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'LOST YEARS': WEST INDIAN WOMEN WRITING AND
PUBLISHING IN BRITAIN c. 1960 TO 1979
VOLUME 1

by

SANDRA ELAINE COURTMAN

A thesis submitted to the University of Bristol
through Cheltenham and Gloucester College of Higher Education
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ABSTRACT

This thesis seeks to construct a missing literary-cultural history of the 1960s and 1970s by forging connections between race, gender, class and literary form. The prime aim is to account for an apparent paucity of published writing by women from the anglophone West Indies between 1960-1979, and to recover 'lost' women writers, explore the modes of expression they chose, and why. Research reveals that the most significant genre of writing to emerge from women in this period was - not the novel - but *autobiography*, set both in the colonial West Indies and in post-war Britain.

The research objectives of the thesis have been facilitated by dividing the work into two parts, and also by including original evidence for many of the thesis's findings in its volume of Appendices. The first part, 'Reconstructing the "Lost Years": Methods, Sources and Contexts', addresses the problems faced in attempting to reconstruct a 'hidden history'. The second part, 'Changing the World Versus Writing Stories', is divided into chapters which: account for the consequences of women's involvement in journalism, publishing and politics at this time; bring into view a sample of novels and poetry that have received virtually no critical attention; and discuss women's writing often ignored in literary histories, such as working-class writing, autobiography, recipes and songs. In the 1960s and 1970s, West Indian women writers experimented with new voices and forms which were under-valued at the time and, it is argued, that literary histories generally deal with the novel and poetry and privilege expressive spaces that largely excluded women in this period. The thesis will make available new writing for further analysis and it is hoped will contribute to the sociology of literature in explaining why some women writers continue to be 'lost' within conventional cultural history.

DECLARATION

I certify that the work contained in this thesis is solely that of the candidate and that the views expressed therein are those of the author and not of the university. This thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published, spoken or written by another person where due reference is not made in the text.

SELOWMAN

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PREFACE

The thesis that follows has come on a long journey since the project was first discussed some four years ago, and has taken some unexpected trails. To explain its present place of arrival, it seems appropriate to give a brief account of its original inception, together with a recognition of its indebtedness to many of those who helped it along the way and who, after all, it is about.

Inspired by reading Fredric Jameson's essay, 'Periodising the 60s', this project began life with an interest in the construction of the 1960s and was originally conceived as a kind of general 'period' study. However, when the daunting scale of such an ambition was fully appreciated, a narrower focus had to be identified, and a study of what at that time I thought of as 'marginalised' women's writing in the period seemed interesting. Apart from a few well-known novels and some poetry by middle-class female writers, where was literary production by women? Why did 'the Sixties' seem to be so male-dominated in literary terms? I originally thought of producing a study about working-class women's writing - and could think of very few examples (even Nell Dunn wasn't working-class and Catherine Cookson's substantial corpus was dismissed as formulaic fiction). But if I was having trouble identifying working-class women writers, what about the even more 'marginalised' area of *black women's* writing? Might we expect there to be black women's writing which records something of the experience of a massive post-war migration to Britain? I was struck by the shameful admission that having studied for two degrees in literature - including a Master of Arts degree which focused on African-American literature - that I was unable to name a single Caribbean or black British woman author.

The thesis at that stage began to shape itself into a study which might encompass all of the above questions and began with a working title borrowed in part from Nell Dunn's 1967 novel: 'Poor Cows: The "Marginalisation" of Working-Class Women Novelists, circa 1960-1979'. It was soon recognised that

the term 'Poor Cows', despite its literary pedigree, was received as an insult by some of the early correspondents, and that the concept of 'marginality' in feminist postcolonial discourse was equally problematical and the subject of a thesis in itself.

It appeared that there were few black women's novels or working-class novels attributed to the period - and an interest in how women writers came to publish their work was fuelled by reading feminist critics and cultural historians, such as Tillie Olsen's *Silences* and Joanna Russ's *How To Suppress Women's Writing*. I was stimulated by work which made connections between publishing, class, race and gender. This interest was intensified early on in the project by the opportunity to attend, in March 1995, my first 'academic' conference, held at Sheffield Hallam University, where scholars, authors and publishers met to debate 'Literature: A Woman's Business'.

As I began to research the available sources, and tried to identify the 'primary material' the thesis would eventually focus upon, a paradox presented itself in that whilst this would be a huge task, there might not actually be enough appropriate 'primary' material to sustain a PhD thesis. Simultaneously, the potential problems began to multiply in dealing with both white working-class women, and black women who may or may not be described as working-class, and who may or may not be described as 'immigrants', and whose experience could not be conflated in social/racial terms with indigenous white women. Furthermore, what did 'black' mean: Caribbean, African, Asian? And if it meant all of these - even within the British context - the problems of conflating the enormous linguistic and cultural differences were equally insistent. At about this point, I had set up and begun the interviews in order to establish a field on which the research was clearly going to rely, but it became apparent that the focus would have to be narrowed even more sharply. What I was finding was that, even for the relatively limited field of Caribbean women's writing in Britain alone, enormous amounts of basic research would have to be undertaken, simply

because nothing much seemed to be known about black women's work in the defined period, or even if it existed at all.

Several major decisions were now taken: white working-class women writers justified a separate study and would have to be excluded; 'black' would mean anglophone West Indian women writing and publishing in Britain; the period, for various reasons given in the body of the thesis would be c.1960-1979; and the writing to be explored could not primarily focus on the novel form. The *thesis* of the research now began to define itself. While literary histories would have us believe that West Indian women's writing (with the exception of Jean Rhys) barely existed in the transitional period of massive post-war migration to Britain, my own experience was that women always write - and especially in times of turmoil, separation and loss of family ties. My research task, therefore, was to seek to recover whatever 'lost' women's writing there was from that period, and to explore the historical conditions surrounding its production. In establishing what turned out to be, in effect, a new field of West Indian women's writing in Britain in the 1960s and '70s, it became possible to explain why so little written production had found its way into public recognition, and to bring into view - hopefully to enable further scholarly attention and re-assessment - examples of barely known writing from that period. The research was dependent on successful retrieval of primary materials and their historical contexts, as the volume of Appendices now reveals. Consequently, the thesis inclines as much towards a form of cultural history as to literary criticism.

It is because the thesis represents the (re-)discovery of a new research field that I regard it as essential that I acknowledge the assistance received from countless people. This thesis could never have come into existence or have been completed without their input. Many people with very crowded lives were gracious enough to expend time and energy on the project and their names appear throughout the Appendices. I especially wish acknowledge the generosity of Dr Anne Walmsley, Professor Louis James, Dr Jeremy Poynting, Dr Beryl Gilroy,

Barbara Ferland, Peter James, Ken Worpole, Tim Diggles, Nick Pollard and Roger Mills, who were not only instrumental in the development of ideas, but also gave me access to otherwise unavailable materials in their own collections. I am grateful to Dr Bridget Jones who employed her extensive network of Caribbeanists to help me trace Joyce Gladwell, Gloria Escoffery and Barbara Ferland. I should like to acknowledge Dr Alison Light's patient and thoughtful comments on the drafts. Professor Peter Widdowson provided guidance, support and encouragement above and beyond the call of duty on the long and challenging journey it has taken to produce this work.

PART 1 RECONSTRUCTING THE 'LOST YEARS': METHODOLOGIES, SOURCES AND CONTEXTS

CHAPTER 1

'HIDDEN FROM HISTORY'

1.1 Introduction

In 1956, the Dominican author of *Wide Sargasso Sea* was traced by the BBC to an address in Bude, Cornwall; it was the same year that Francis Wyndham had published an article in which he incorrectly referred to her as 'the late Jean Rhys'.¹ Her 'discovery' led to the signing of a now historic publishing contract for a novel that had existed in draft form for at least twenty years.² Rhys's work, much of it from the 1930s, was recovered and recognised too late for her to feel much of the benefit. She was, by then, in her seventies and debilitated from years of trying to write with *No privacy, No cash, No security, No resilience, No youth, No desk to write on, No table even, No one who understands.*³ Part of the title of the present thesis, 'Lost Years', was inspired by biographer Angier's metaphor for the years, from 1939 to 1956, during which it was assumed that Rhys had ceased writing and had died in poverty and obscurity.

An obvious speculation, that other West Indian women writers in Britain might similarly have fallen into obscurity, provided the motive for this thesis's attempt at their recuperation. Ironically, given Rhys's 'rediscovery' in the mid 1960s and the classic status now attributed to *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the 1960s represents a decade of 'lost years' for West Indian women writers more generally. There is a considerable body of scholarship on Rhys and rather than add to the critical discussion of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, my preference was to search for those other 'lost' writers, some of whom may have been of Rhys's generation. The

search focused on work produced between 1960 and up to 1979, since by the later date socio-political factors were contributing to a changed climate in British publishing which was to see the release of marginalised writing, including that expressing West Indian women's experience. This research concerns itself with the decades *before* this release and explores an acknowledged paucity of published writing in Britain by a disparate group of women from the anglophone West Indies. The exploration was based on the fundamental premise that it was probable that other West Indian women *were* writing: something, in some form, somewhere. For reasons of accessibility and feasibility, the search was restricted to work published in Britain. However, the research acknowledges the valuable work of Caribbean scholars which has revealed the existence of 'lost' women's writing in the newspapers, journals and literary magazines published in the regions of the Caribbean.⁴

It is well known that finding outlets and audiences for published writing was notably difficult in the colonial West Indies, and given the existence of Rhys's generation of travellers to Europe, together with the level of post-war migration to Britain, we might expect more published writing by West Indian women writing in Britain. Its apparent absence is bound to bury a set of complex historical conditions which, when explored, conceal a 'hidden history' of West Indian women's written expression.⁵ Joan Anim-Addo and other scholars note the apparent lacuna in British published West Indian women's writing which exists between the early autobiographies of Mary Prince (1831) and Mary Seacole (1857) to the novel that Sylvia Wynter published in 1962.⁶ However, existing scholarship suggested that very little writing was published in the 1960s and 1970s which might have begun to fill this gap. It seemed important to attempt to understand, therefore, why so many West Indian women only began to be known as 'writers' in the 1980s. Such a notable absence in literary histories provoked this study's key research questions, all of which are all underpinned by a challenge to the mythology that West Indian women were simply not writing. What historical

conditions would encourage or prevent women from writing? Who was writing, what were they writing about and in what forms? Who had access to publishing and what type of publishing was available to them? What happened to their writing and how might this have affected their subsequent careers? What do we learn from their writing about general developments in Caribbean and Black-British attempts to find a voice in the literary media? As a consequence, therefore, this thesis's prime aim is the recovery of the women of Sylvia Wynter's generation: their writing, their development, what choices of expression they made, and why.

In seeking to answer the above questions, the research begins to lay down some of the foundations of a literary and cultural history which might account for the absence of women writers, and which might place this phenomenon within post-war developments in Caribbean literary history. In this, it emphasises the importance of *transition* - from colonial to independent; from patriarchal to feminist; from migrant to Black-British - in the history of women's literary expression in this period, and in understanding why there appears to be so little published writing by women writers. Of course, the 1960s and '70s were decades of intense political change in the West Indies and for West Indians settling in Britain, and they represent a transitional phase for *all* Caribbean writers - male and female. But the purpose of this research is to trace *women writers'* struggles to find forms and voices - themselves largely lost within those transitions - which were to play an important part in freeing up a new postcolonial literary space for the next generation of Caribbean women writers.

One reflection of the transitional nature of the period under scrutiny which requires brief comment here is the instability of the terms used to describe people from the 'Caribbean' region, and indeed, in the challenges to a notion of it as a definitive geographical space (in terms of population and culture, parts of Miami, Florida might be regarded as having many of the characteristics of the Caribbean). In the present thesis, the slippage between the terms 'Caribbean' and

'West Indian' is allowed to stand at the expense of neatness and consistency, but it is intended to signal a period on the cusp of an important historical shift which would reassign sites of colonisation to their remaining pre-Columbian inhabitants. The difficulty with 'West Indian' as a form of nomenclature is explained by Evelyn O'Callaghan in her book, *Woman Version*: 'the term "West Indian" is somewhat problematic, given that it is a misnomer and inscribes the region within Columbus's ignorance.'⁷ Nevertheless, it ascribes a linguistic/historical/geographical specificity to the subjects of this study, who often refer to themselves as 'West Indians'. In practice, both terms are needed and, like Alistair Hennessy the editor for the Warwick University Caribbean Studies series, I 'use one or the other wherever textually (and stylistically) appropriate'.⁸

Furthermore, although the sample of writing presented in this thesis and listed in its Appendices, is British published, this does not mean that the writer was a British resident for any period of time, or that the potential audience for such publications was necessarily British. In this context, the research has revealed two distinct aspects of Caribbean expression which coexist during the period under discussion. Differently oriented, and arising from different aspirations, the distinctions are sharply reflected in the examples of writing selected. Some of the writing is wholeheartedly focused on life in the Caribbean and represents the fact that, for many writers in this period, their interest in Britain was primarily as a publishing outlet. The second major strand of writing considered here is that which arises as a direct response to migration and attempts at settlement. The former takes as its subject matter the Caribbean and Caribbean history, politics, family life, whilst the latter principally focuses on the experience of being a Caribbean living in Britain. However, reminiscence writing sometimes employs a Caribbean setting as a response to the very certainty of long term settlement in Britain and the need to preserve knowledge of the world 'back home' for a British born generation. Hence, the writing selected for

discussion is necessarily diverse in subject matter and reflects these disparate agendas.

This thesis, then, is concerned to identify factors which undoubtedly worked against the majority of first- and second-wave West Indian writers, but, in particular, to understand these struggles in the context of gender and class determinants. In this, it aims to make a contribution to the sociology of literature and to explain why West Indian women writers continue to be 'lost' within popular accounts of the period. It challenges the mythologies that would have us believe that women were not writing and/or seeking publication during this period and it will also, therefore, offer a reconstruction of the period from a gendered point-of-view. Such a reconstruction of the period should also enable a reinterpretation of the legacy available to contemporary Black-British writers.

In the search for West Indian women's literary expression, no form of writing and no group of writers has been privileged over another. Any anticipation of a treasure-trove of *Wide Sargasso Sea*'s waiting to be discovered was almost certainly bound to be frustrated. Indeed, for several of the reasons adduced in Chapter 4, the novel-form and its conventions proved to be problematical for many West Indian writers during the post-war period. A recent *Guardian* article by Maya Jaggi, whilst celebrating a new and flourishing generation of Black-British writers, acknowledges their debt only to the male authors, Sam Selvon, George Lamming, and Kamau Brathwaite, as the quintessential 'West Indian on the final passage' novelists. She states that 'In the 1950s and early 1960s, West Indians published more than 130 novels in English.'⁹ This statistic is some indication of the intense publishing activity in that period (though inevitably inaccurate - see Appendices 4 and 5). But if we take these statistics to signal the phenomenon that Tillie Olsen identified as the 'unnatural silences' in which only 'one in twelve' publications were likely to be by a woman - then even in the worst scenario, out of the 130 published novels from West Indian authors eleven should have been published by women.¹⁰ The present research explores

the history buried beneath such statistics, and reveals the factors which determine an even lower proportion of novels by West Indian women writers.

The writers in this thesis are the descendants of long-colonised societies and the novel is still a relatively young form which renders the emergence of a Caribbean or a Black British Toni Morrison only a potentiality. Any comparison, therefore, with black American writing must recognise that the 'grand narratives' of the African-American novel have developed as part of a much longer tradition, and a quite different set of social and political conditions, to those in Britain or the Caribbean. In 1980, at the very end of the period defined for this research, C.L.R. James gave an interview to Daryl Dance. James, the author of one of the earliest black Caribbean novels, *Minty Alley* (1936), admires the achievements of African-Americans, Walker and Morrison, is prompted to comment on equivalent women writers from the Caribbean, and pays tribute to Sylvia Wynter as an exceptional 'writer of history and a critic of politics'. But his final comment focuses on one of the issues at the heart of my investigation:

James: *We* have not produced the women writers as yet. George Lamming tells me that he is waiting for the woman in the Caribbean to write a novel which will state the position of the Caribbean. Well, he is waiting for her. I am waiting for her too.¹¹

James (and others) were very much concerned, in their own work, with 'the problem' of how to write a novel that would account for the lives of the black majority population of the Caribbean, and with how literary form could serve the representation of ordinary lives - which must surely include the lives of women. He would also have understood, and in some ways been complicit in, the attitudes which prevailed to discourage women from entering a relatively young, male-dominated, literary tradition. Not surprisingly, therefore, the present research reveals that the most significant genre of writing to emerge from women in this period was - not the novel - but *autobiography*, set both in the colonial West Indies and in post-war Britain, and more weight and space has been given

over to that form of writing. Such work charts many of the important aspects of transition, and especially of the women writers' struggles for post-migration identities and voices.

1.2 Recovering the 'Hidden History'

The principal research objectives of the thesis - that is, of seeking to trace the existence of 'lost' West Indian women's writing, of understanding the contexts in which it was produced, and then of analysing the rediscovered written production itself - have been addressed by dividing the work into two parts, and by including the weight of original evidence for many of the thesis's findings in its volume of substantive Appendices. The first part, 'Reconstructing the "Lost Years": Methods, Sources and Contexts', comprises Chapters 1 and 2 and addresses the problems faced in attempting to reconstruct a 'hidden history'; the second, 'Changing the World Versus Writing Stories', examines a selection of examples of West Indian women's writing in Britain from the 1960s and '70s.

Part One

The central problem of a thesis of the present kind involves the actual constitution of a new 'field' for research when no such field has hitherto existed, in order precisely to be able to research it. There exists a field of pioneering scholarship on Caribbean women's writing, notably Carole Boyce Davies and Elaine Fido Savory, *Out of the KUMBLA*; Evelyn O'Callaghan, *Woman Version: Theoretical Approaches to West Indian Fiction by Women*; Selwyn R. Cudjoe, ed., *Caribbean Women Writers: Essays From the First International Conference*.¹² However, there has been no major study on the paucity of writing

from West Indian women writing in Britain in the 1960s and '70s.¹³ Studies on Caribbean women's writing have tended to concentrate on work published in the 1980s or on white West Indians of a generation earlier, such as Rhys. Not only must the writing itself be recovered, but its determining social and critical contexts must also be constructed. By definition 'lost writing' is unresearched, untheorised, and lies outside the discussions of an established body of criticism and cultural history. Hence the present chapter will acknowledge the value, and limitations of existing bibliographies and critical studies; give examples of the circulation of inaccuracies in written sources in an under-researched field; explain how writers, historians and scholars were selected for interview or correspondence; explicate the need for a feminist methodology in managing the interviews; and describe the use of appropriate methods of analysis for interview material. Chapter 2 attempts to establish some of the contexts in which Caribbean women writers of the period developed, including an account of the migration experience, and then of the way the intersection of race, gender and class determined the nature of women writers' involvement in networks and organisations like 'Caribbean Voices', 'The Caribbean Artists Movement', and 'The Federation of Worker Writers and Publishers.' The methodology deployed throughout Part One involves an historicist eclecticism necessary to enable the meaningful reading of the recovered publications discussed in Part Two. Such material must be read, with and through other discourses, such as bibliographies, author interviews and correspondence, collective oral histories and other evidence of arrival and settlement, institutional histories, and contemporary reviews and criticism.

The main problems in constructing the research field, and the methods used to overcome them, are dealt with briefly in separate sub-sections below. But it is worth noting one essential prop in undertaking research of the kind described here: the keeping of a 'Research Journal' throughout the stages of the project.

Research Journal

The journal contains informal entries, some 60,000 words, on discussions, meetings, references, conference papers, literary events, and workshops, and it also provided an informal space to formulate questions, to 'play out' fledgling ideas and to record responses to practical and theoretical problems. The very first journal entry will serve as an example: 5th October 1994 records the starting point of the dissatisfaction I began to experience with a range of period studies that concerned themselves with the 1960s:

I set to work reading general and popular histories of the sixties.[...] I make a note of any novels, plays and significant events of the period to gain a framework for the popular construction(s) of the period. [...] I produce a literature and its context table (a la Tallack) for two years in the period, 1963 and 1969.¹⁴ At this stage I search for general works on the period: literature, history or politics. I quickly become bored as they all appear to be telling the same story, quoting the same authors, same events, same questions, same conclusions. I begin to search for the unusual, lesser known authors.

With hindsight, the journal now shows how, in ways analogous to the methodology of archaeology, fragments of information were meticulously recorded at the retrieval stage, even though their relevance did not become clear until much later when connections between them could be made. Furthermore, in recording reflections on the researcher's own presuppositions, observations, and reactions, it served the need, outlined below by Rosalind Edwards in her essay 'Connecting Method and Epistemology: A White Woman Interviewing Black Women' to locate the researcher within the process:¹⁵

First, on an intellectual level, the researcher should make explicit the reasoning procedures she utilised in carrying out her research. Second, on what is often called a reflexive level, the researcher's effect upon the actual process of research, her class, race, sex, assumptions and beliefs, should be explicated in terms of its effect upon the research and upon analysis.¹⁶

The 'Research Journal' helped in keeping these crucial points in view, especially, as will become apparent below, when preparing for and carrying out the interviews which, as it transpired, came to lie at the heart of the research project. The problem of gaining access to interview subjects, in what turned out to be a relatively closed circle, is demonstrated by the entry for Saturday 24th June, 1995 which records the events of 'A Brighter Sun: a celebration of the life and work of Sam Selvon' at The Royal Festival Hall, London. The various papers given by John La Rose, Pearl Connor-Mogotsi, George Lamming, Jason Salkey (who read Andrew's tribute to Selvon, prepared immediately before his own unexpected death), Ken Ramchand, Austin Clarke and Susheila Nasta contained a wealth of anecdotal information and insight which forced me to consider how a group dynamic might operate to support and encourage writers (see Chapter 2). As a minority white member of an exclusive audience, I was very much the outsider - the research student with everything to learn. I understood that progress depended entirely on the good nature of this fraternity of writers, activists, publishers and intellectuals. It was a stressful situation in that the author Beryl Gilroy had offered to meet me for the first time in the foyer after the event and I sensed that this meeting, on semi-neutral ground, would determine whether I was able to establish a rapport with her. This part of the entry records what turned out to be a critical event and indicated the possibility of some degree of acceptance by the group:

Tea break. And I stood around waiting for Anne [Walmsley] to introduce me to Beryl but Anne kept getting stopped by people who threw their arms around her and gave her a warm hug. This contrasted acutely with how much I was feeling like an outsider. I seemed to be the only one on my own, as everyone else appeared to be kissing each other like long-lost friends. My awkwardness was apparent and I looked anxiously toward Beryl Gilroy who was alone on the other side of the foyer. I wondered whether to introduce myself but didn't want to pre-empt Anne's kindness. Anyway, I was rescued by Jessica [Huntley] who shook my hand warmly. I enquired about Mumia [Abu-Jamal] and in true style, she fished in her handbag for a campaign update and gave it to me. She then took me by the hand to meet Beryl Gilroy.

At the public meeting I was able to arrange the first of several subsequent private interviews with Beryl Gilroy, and thus the journal records, how the initial contact was achieved that enabled much of the work on this author to be completed.

Bibliographies and Critical Studies

Since the 1970s there has been a steady expansion in reference works about Caribbean women's writing.¹⁷ These publications begin to establish a field of women's writing which has, for complex reasons, hitherto gone unrecorded, although recovery in an under-researched field is beset by inaccuracies. For example, errors are repeated in the following two references to Sylvia Wynter's novel, published in 1962. Selwyn Cudjoe's important introduction to *Caribbean Women Writers: Essays from the First International Conference* misplaces Wynter's novel historically: 'The last work of importance in the first phase of Caribbean women's writing was Sylvia Wynter's *Hills of Hebron* (1966)...'. The Cudjoe error reappears in Susheila Nasta's essay on 'The English Speaking Caribbean' in *The Bloomsbury Guide to Women's Literature*: '[f]inally, Sylvia Wynter's work, both as literary critic and novelist, was crucial during this phase of Caribbean women's writing. *The Hills of Hebron* (1966)...'. Authors were attributed to work that does not belong to them: in Sarah Richardson, Merylyn Cherry, Sammy Palfrey, *Writing on the Line: 20th Century Working Class Women Writers*, Janice Shinebourne appears as the author of *Rainsplitter in the Zodiac Garden* (1977) - actually written by Penelope Shuttle.¹⁸

More recently, Sandra Barnes's work typifies the current drive toward collecting accurate information on Caribbean women writers. Her compilation for a new database, 'Caribwom', is representative of the prime objective for many of these projects: that is '[t]o retrieve and document the literary output of Caribbean women writers and to disseminate this information in published and/or computer produced format'.¹⁹ Such bibliographies are starting-points and cannot explain the

absence of women writers in critical discussions of the literary developments of the period under review. Moreover, the absence of women's contribution is often tied to discussions which rest heavily on the production of prose fiction, as has been noted earlier. Edward Brathwaite, Kenneth Ramchand, and more recently, Maya Jaggi and Edward Baugh, reinforce the characterisation of this period as one which saw the emergence of the Caribbean novel and typically those novelists were male.²⁰ The point of departure for the present research was to construct gendered social, political and historical contexts which would challenge literary-historical accounts whose tendency is to deal exclusively with male-dominated forms like the novel in the 1960s and '70s. In doing so, this project has generated a supporting (original) bibliography in Appendix 5 which has been fraught with all the usual false-starts and inaccuracies. My 'Year-by-Year' bibliography was inspired by that in Ramchand's ground-breaking *The West Indian Novel and its Background* (in Appendix 4). However, over the four years that my list has taken to arrive at its present state, there have been constant amendments, cross-references, corrections, additions and exclusions: for example, in the Commonwealth Institute Library's *Caribbean Writing: A Checklist, No.4*, there were entries for three writers which I researched and included in my Appendix 5. I could find no information on Elizabeth Coatsworth, Dorothy Clewes and Mary Cockett other than the British Library catalogue details for their publications for children. The titles of their texts (*Peter and the Jumbie*, *Wilberforce and the Slaves* and others) suggested the possibility of a Caribbean connection. However, in 1998, I found entries for them in Kirkpatrick's *Twentieth Century Children's Writers* (1978) which revealed their birthplaces as Nottingham, Yorkshire and Buffalo, New York. Their connections to the Caribbean, therefore, were far too vague to justify their inclusion and they were removed.²¹

It was clear that some of the conventional starting points for literary research such as bibliographies and citation indexes would provide limited assistance in

supplying the type of sources that were going to prove necessary in constructing the 'absent' literary/cultural history of women's writing in this period. A combination of methods was needed to locate sources and materials, as was a range of sources to construct the context for the writing. By far the most important of these for filling gaps in knowledge, constructing arguments, locating sources, and tracing authors turned out to be interviews, together with private correspondence (see Appendices 1, 2 and 3).

Interviews

Whilst a hidden history of West Indian's women's writing and experience would clearly require that many types of documentation be consulted, an early assumption was made that interviewing would advance the project in a way that other methods could not. However, as the oral historian Mary Chamberlain reminds us, 'Memory recorded through speech is often a raw document', and so the problems were how to obtain and interpret that 'raw document', and how to deal with the subject's reconstruction of history through the filter of memory.²² Interpretation of oral material requires the same concern with issues of authenticity, accuracy, and validity, that apply to the interpretation of any other types of documentation. Oral historians validate their projects on the basis that this account - raw, biased, and reconstructed - is simply not available elsewhere. As part of this research strategy, whilst drawing on the oral history methodology, the interviews were used as supporting material for a range of sources. Formal interviews were necessary in order to fill in the history and the context of West Indian's women's writing for the 1960s and '70s and in formulating ideas and explanations which might account for the apparent absence of women's writing. However, sociologists have pointed out that 'we know little about how people feel about being interviewed'; experience suggests that many people feel intimidated and/or inhibited by the process.²³ Hence, more unstructured and

informal contact with writers and scholars was also sought through attendance at conferences, writers' workshops and literary events. As a high proportion of Caribbean scholars are also creative writers, and have knowledge of the determinants of literary production from their own experience, such chance meetings often proved more effective in terms of access and information than formal requests for interview.²⁴

The majority of the formal interviews took place early in the research, towards the end of the first year of the project (see Appendix 2.1 for a full list of interviews and significant discussions). The request for an interview was based on the following criteria: that otherwise unavailable information on texts, authors and historical contexts would be acquired, and that the mythology surrounding the 'absence' of women's writing could be explored through a range of discussions with selected 'expert' witnesses from various fields. Not surprisingly, a growing feminist scholarship in Caribbean women's writing has concerned itself mainly (though not exclusively) with writing that blossomed in the 1980s; so that statements like the following one in David Dabydeen and Nana Wilson-Tagoe's *A Reader's Guide to West Indian and Black British Literature* provided the stimulus of the interview questions:

Very few women write for a living in the West Indies, and the paucity of writers is perhaps a good explanation for the absence of a tradition of women's writing in the sense that it exists for instance in Black American literature.²⁵

The interviews not only explored the possibility of tracing 'lost' authors, but also sought explanations as to how the effects of an 'absence of a tradition' for women's writing in the Caribbean operated in the 1960s and '70s. In addition, they were structured to provide a broad descriptive and analytical framework for the exploration of themes in the material considered in Part Two of the thesis.

The selection of correspondents was initially derived from critical and historical sources, and from suggestions made by advisors with expertise in the various fields of cultural studies, women's studies, feminist literary criticism, the sociology of migration, working-class writing, and popular culture. Thirty one requests for interview were made to writers, scholars, activists and publishers, and there was an option for correspondents to provide written information (this was sometimes the only option: see Appendix 1.3 for an example of a request-letter to an author resident in Canada). The first stage of requests produced twenty seven positive responses which offered to discuss the project in the form of face-to-face interviews, telephone interviews, or by providing written information. Subsequently further interviews/requests were made and some subjects were interviewed more than once (Appendix 2.1 briefly explains why the subjects were chosen). A number of the interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim (see Appendix 3 for an examples). Where interviewees declined to have their discussion tape-recorded, notes were taken at the time or immediately afterwards. The interviews were loosely structured around the research questions identified earlier (pp. 2-3); they were open-ended and interviewees were encouraged to discuss any topic. In all cases, the questions were used as prompts and were modified to allow the interviewee to relate their specialist knowledge or experience to the discussion (for examples of modified approaches to different interviewees see Appendix 3). Interviews lasted between forty minutes and four hours and took place in a variety of private and public settings.

Some interview requests failed because the institutional form and tone of the initial request letter was misjudged, particularly amongst correspondents who had little interest or investment in academic research. An advisor suggested, after some of her associates had received the letter, that both the wording and the provisional title of the thesis ('Poor Cows: The "Marginalisation" of Working-Class Women Novelists, circa 1960-1979', as noted in the Preface

earlier) had alienated some correspondents. Using college-headed note paper and a standard letter which was intended to present the research as academically credible, was, in retrospect, misjudged as a general strategy, since some correspondents were hostile to educational institutions (see Appendix 1 for an example of how this strategy was deliberately changed in later correspondence). Rosalind Edwards describes how her position as a white sociologist determined her lack of access to black working-class women, citing this response from one of her correspondents: 'I've got friends, or acquaintance (sic), who don't want anything to do with white people'²⁶ - a reaction which produced the following cautionary observation:

It would seem that we need to think more carefully about how we make this contact, and not make the assumption that institutions which give us status and credibility in the eyes of white women will necessarily do so in the eyes of black women.²⁷

A methodology was needed which would take account of the fact that some writers and activists regarded research in the Humanities as a meaningless activity, so that later contact was careful to consider the individual's likely response.

It also became clear that the approach and method should be modified to widen the sample of correspondents. It was important that the research was not limited merely to the interests and experiences of the highly articulate and educated: that is, those black women who were the most likely to respond to requests for interviews. But there was then the need to recognise that some black working-class respondents regarded white researchers as outsiders who represented oppressive or exclusive institutions, and were suspicious of all research activity, based on a history of misinterpreted and/or misused 'results'. The problem of access could only be partially resolved by various strategies: on one occasion, by a proxy interview that was conducted and taped by a friend (and

a member of the woman's family). The interview was then transcribed. Generally, it proved preferable to meet and talk with black working-class women in an informal setting. Attendance at Federation of Worker Writer and Community Publishers' events, which I attended as a creative writer, allowed for access and dialogue that would almost certainly not have taken place within a formal interview situation. Approaches to writers for information in this setting removed some of the threat that might be attached to 'research'. However, in such cases, credibility and rapport had to be established by evidence of knowledge and preparation prior to any discussion. A Jamaican interviewee - who wept and talked openly about the pain of being labelled illiterate, who provided personal evidence of how the label had blighted her life, and who revealed ways in which her educational status had hampered her opportunities for marriage and a family - prefaced our discussion with 'I'll tell you about this because you seem to know a lot about it anyway' (this respondent wished to remain anonymous).

The interviews often presented difficulties that were awkward to manage. For example, the unexpected death of Andrew Salkey meant that the Caribbean community was in shock and, understandably, some respondents were not amenable to requests for interviews at that time, whilst the often public settings threw up fresh challenges in respect of recording them.²⁸ Again, thorough preparation could not forearm the interviewer against false presuppositions, so that some interviews began with the type of misconceptions (on both sides) that are indelibly coded in the power relations between white researcher and black interviewee. Where I anticipated hostility to my position, it was often unwarranted. Interviewees sometimes expressed their own preconceptions regarding academics, whom they saw as being of a different race and class which represented 'the opposition'. As Hazel Carby has written:

Black feminists have been, and are still, demanding that the existence of racism must be acknowledged as a structuring feature of our relationships with white women. Both white feminist theory and practice have to recognise

that white women stand in a power relation as oppressors of black women. This compromises any feminist theory and practice founded on the notion of simple equality.²⁹

As many other feminists have pointed out, notions of an all-encompassing sisterhood which buries race, class and cultural divisions is a myth: the boundaries of sisterhood are circumscribed by race- and class-markers and the latter superimpose a supposed gender equality. Where it appeared that such forms of inequality impinged on the interview, the white researcher found herself standing as a representative of institutional oppression. Learning to address the inequalities began with an acknowledgement of the ways in which the race, class and sex of the researcher affected the nature of the divide. However, on occasions the very nature of that divide may have stimulated the revelation of information thought to be problematic for an interviewer from the same social group. As a case in point, during my interview with Dorothy Blake, she appeared to value the opportunity to discuss aspirations, to write her life story, which would place her in conflict with the expectations of her own community. It is unlikely that she would have felt able to reveal these aspirations (perceived as 'above her station') to a member of her family or social group in Jamaica.³⁰ Interviewees give different answers to different interviewers and as Paul Thompson emphasises: 'it is not necessarily true that an interviewer of the same sex, class, race will obtain more accurate information'.³¹

The present research was concerned with the involvement of women writers in the history of writers' networks and organisations, and such groups which are often marginalised, protect themselves from infiltration and misappropriation. As an outsider, gaining unofficial membership of an international club of expatriate Caribbeans, or access to the writer members of the Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers, was facilitated through personal recommendation by existing members. Like many exclusive clubs, admittance was achieved by introduction.³² There was also a clear sense that the group was protecting some of

the older and more fragile members: introductions were made, but contacts were equally likely to be discouraged where it was felt that the subject's health would suffer or where s/he had been 'plagued' by researchers. Equally the criterion for access between researcher and the community of writers was a two-way process: members who provided information and initiated contacts were simultaneously assessing the researcher's entitlement to these privileges, as judged by evidence of her motivation, commitment, preparation, sensitivity and respect. The process reflected Thompson's principle that: 'The relationship between history and the community should not be one-sided in either direction: but rather a series of exchanges, a dialectic, between information and interpretation, between educationalists and their localities, between classes and generations.'³³

Diversity in the interview material called for a combination of interpretative strategies that were served by textual analysis which treated the interview as a type of literary text; a type of analysis employed by sociologists in qualitative interviews (which identifies recurring themes and codes in communication); and an oral-history methodology explicated by Thompson in *The Voice of the Past* (which looks for historical patterns). But all required that the proceedings of the interview were transcribed fully wherever possible. All tapes were transcribed by the researcher, and this ensured that there was a high degree of familiarity with the content. The transcriptions include hesitations and stop-gaps and the grammar and word-order were retained (see Appendix 3 for examples of the above procedures). However, in the event of future researchers using these new historical sources, care must be taken to consider how the transcript loses rhythms, tones, gestures, facial expression, and other important non-verbal aspects of communication. Errors and omissions were also bound to occur; but in the case of transcripts presented as examples in the Appendices, the interviewees were sent copies and invited to make corrections. Twenty two interviews provided notes or full transcripts, and as such make up only a relatively small sample for analysis. However, my transcripts were supplemented by some of

those interviews conducted and transcribed by Anne Walmsley during the course of her research for *The Caribbean Artists Movement*. Dr Walmsley was generous enough to allow me access to her interview transcripts with women interviewees (notes on relevant material drawn from the Walmsley transcripts appear in Appendix 2.2). Nevertheless, this number has seemed sufficient given the richness and diversity of material presented by the interviewees, and because individual contributions were sought for a particular experience rather than any statistical validity. Thompson cites the sociologist, Herbert Blumer's assertion that 'a half dozen individuals with such knowledge constitutes a far better "representative" sample than a thousand individuals who may be involved in the action that is being formed but who are not knowledgeable about that formation'.³⁴ The information received from the interviews was treated as a complementary resource in the construction of the history of the writing and the experience of the writers. Nevertheless, interviews allowed scholarly explanations of women's absence from literary history to be compared with personal accounts. During analysis, cross-checking with other sources of information was continuous in order to enable the interviews to be placed in a wider context.

In the event, a type of thematic content-analysis was used to explore the transcripts as qualitative data with recurring themes and explanations accounting for a paucity of women's writing.³⁵ Theoretical explanations (presented below) were put to interviewees to test their general validity against experience, and thus the following ten 'themes' were deployed insofar as they might be expected to impinge on Caribbean women writers. They may be further categorised into those factors which are supposed to impact on 'ordinary' women writers from working-class backgrounds, and those offered as explanations for the paucity of creative writing from women educated to university level.

1. Women did not write because in the case of the majority of 'ordinary' women their education may have finished in early adolescence. Therefore, it is argued, they would have had an insufficient level of literary skill to write to a mainstream publication standard.
2. 'Ordinary' women who migrated to Britain from the West Indies did not write because their daily struggles to survive and settle into a hostile country would have absorbed their energies, even given the impulse to record their experience.
3. The impulse to write simply does not exist for the majority of 'ordinary' West Indian women and is rejected as an inappropriate form of expression.
4. West Indian women are central to an oral tradition which is necessarily circumscribed by a closed community, and that this tradition might block any notion of a need to write stories or record experience for the wider world.
5. Women who came to Britain for educational purposes (graduate, postgraduate and professional) were absorbed by the need to produce Caribbean-focused research and scholarship, not creative writing.
6. Political organisation took precedence over the impulse towards personal expression.
7. Gender politics were instrumental in suppressing the writing and/or publication of work by women.
8. There is a tendency for women writers to delay presenting manuscripts for publication and to delay the writing itself.

9. There is no tradition of women writing fiction in the West Indies, and therefore there are no role-models for women writers to follow.

10. Early material by West Indian women writers has received scant reviewing and/or criticism, thus contributing to its low status and obscurity.

Such themes, as generated by this research are neither exhaustive, nor exclusive to West Indian women writers. However, as they emerged, they were found to provide a useful analytical and descriptive framework for discussions of the material during interviews. The ten themes are returned to in the final chapter of the thesis, as a way of assessing how the research supports or refutes prevailing mythologies about West Indian women writers of the 1960s and '70s.

Part Two

In Part Two of the thesis, a selection of the 'lost' writing rediscovered by the researcher is considered from a variety of perspectives, and, where appropriate is contextualised by the recovery of the author's experience of writing, of becoming published, and of being reviewed. In addition, it examines the status accorded to these works at the time, and since, and suggests possibilities for their reappraisal offered by contemporary reassessment. From an introductory analysis which seeks to explain some of the determinants on women writers' choices of form, literary and non-literary, Part Two moves on to trace some of the important political and cultural transitions of this period by way of examining women writers' involvement in journalism, publishing and cultural activism, arguing that, in many cases, it is the direction of their energies into political and other such causes which was to delay the advancement of creative projects.

Later chapters then explore examples of the kinds of 'creative' writing which women authors did, in fact, produce in the period. First, three diverse examples

of the relatively few novels then written by women are considered - focusing in particular on the conditions under which they were written, their authors' choices within the form, and their subsequent status within Caribbean literary history. It is proposed here that Sylvia Wynter's now obscure work, *The Hills of Hebron*, should be reappraised in the light of later critical readings promoted by African-American women's writing. On the other hand it is argued that Merle Hodge's *Crick Crack, Monkey* remains the best known novel from the period, and the only example still in print, because of its appropriation within a wider European literary tradition of the bildungsroman and of its accessibility as a teaching resource. The work of an unknown (possibly Jamaican) author Rosalind Ashe is presented in a discussion of her novel, *Hurricane Wake*, which suggests a continuity with that 'terrified consciousness' of Jean Rhys and Phyllis Shand Allfrey and their Caribbean settings as 'a place of disease and death'.³⁶ A second chapter discusses a sample of women poets and locates their work historically from the 1950s to the late 1970s, arguing that while patriarchal editorial practices in the early 1950s were powerful in suppressing women's poetry, its development can be traced within an increasingly hybrid corpus which blends European literary tradition with songs, recipes, poems and stories from the oral tradition in the Caribbean. It also suggests that unique circumstances were to produce written material, possibly for the first time, by Caribbean beginner writers who joined working-class literacy groups, and that there should be proper recognition for such work both as a rare type of poetic expression and as documentation of a material culture which would otherwise go unrecorded and be 'lost' indeed.

Finally Part Two offers a more extensive survey of women's autobiographical writing - in recognition of the significance of the material recorded in this form. Four full-length autobiographies are considered, together with a selection of working-class autobiographical writings. Section 6.2 discusses work which represents first-hand expression, in a quest for personal and national identity, by the very group that troubled many West Indian intellectuals such as C.L.R.

James, George Lamming, Sylvia Wynter and Marina Maxwell, and which Ramchand describes as inhabiting an 'area of deprivation, longing and rootlessness, where so many people are inarticulate':³⁷ that majority of 'ordinary' working women who transferred to Britain in the first post-war waves of migration. Such work is an important part of the history of developing Black-British expression, and refutes the myth that such women would not have found the time, energy or motivation to record their life-experience in written forms. The extent and nature of working-class writers' aspirations to write become evident, as do the barriers to their achievement; and the unique conditions created by Federation writers and literacy groups, based upon the radical pedagogy of Paulo Friere, are seen to have facilitated written expression and publication amongst a group who might normally be expected to have been disenfranchised from such activities. Beryl Gilroy's 1976 autobiography *Black Teacher* (republished by Bogle-L'Ouverture in 1994), is a unique account of her work as one of the first black teachers in London, and of her attempts to gain her rightful professional status in the face of rampant institutional racism. Gilroy's text has never been considered as a work of literature (unlike the male-authored equivalent, Edward Braithwaite's *To Sir, With Love*), and its 1994 re-print continues to promote its value as a sociological and educational text. It is argued that, since Gilroy's earlier attempts to publish her fiction were frustrated by a series of publishers' rejections, the autobiographical form allowed her to employ structural and narrative strategies which were to resurface in her much later fictional work and which might now be usefully analysed. Section 6.4 concerns the rediscovered 'lost' Jamaican author, Joyce Gladwell (now in Canada), and offers an account of her transfer to a British university - by no means an isolated experience for West Indian women in the 1950s and 1960s, but one which would otherwise appear to be absent from published work in this period - and also challenges the myth that West Indian women who transferred to Britain for educational reasons concentrated their energies on their academic careers rather

than writing about their experience. The white Jamaican, Lucille Iremonger's two autobiographies, *Yes My Darling Daughter* and *And His Charming Lady* present a contrasting and disturbing perspective on the white colonial psyche, in that they expose the extent to which an abusive relationship with her father managed to service both patriarchal control and the reinforcement of imperial chauvinism. It is argued here that whilst Iremonger's work is likely to have been disregarded in postcolonial scholarship because it represents the voice of conservatism and white privilege, her depiction of power relations in the colonial West Indies and in Britain, as played out through the family, should be the subject of more thorough critical enquiry.

The thesis concludes by re-examining some of the mythologies represented by the reiterated 'themes' identified earlier (p. 21-22) which attempt to account for the apparent paucity of published work by Caribbean women in the 1960s and '70s, and for their absence from literary histories. Such explanations and arguments, which recur throughout written sources and the first-hand accounts derived from interviews with writers, critics, publishers and other interested parties, are re-evaluated in the light of all the evidence presented, and future trajectories for research in this area are proposed. This study offers a challenge to a literary history that would have us believe that West Indian women's writing pre-1980s (with the exception of Rhys) barely exists and that the dominant form to emerge in literary/critical discussions is the novel. Such literary histories often favour a view that the most important genre is the migration novel, represented in post-war texts such as Sam Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* (1956), George Lamming's *The Emigrants* (1955), and more recently in Joan Riley's *The Unbelonging* (1985) and David Dabydeen's *The Intended* (1991).³⁸ As far as I have been able to discover, the period under consideration did not produce a novel of migration from a Caribbean woman writer - with the sole exception of Beryl Gilroy's *In Praise of Love and Children* (1996) which was rejected in the 1960s. The conclusion argues that women's writing evidences a struggle to break

with a male-authored, Eurocentric model - in a transitional period which sees West Indian women acquiring skills, building confidence, experimenting with new voices and forms which have subsequently been taken up by the next generation of Caribbean and black British women writers but which were, at the time, misunderstood and under-valued.

- ¹ Carole Angier, *Jean Rhys*, rev. edn (London: Penguin, 1992; first published Deutsch, 1990), p. 471.
- ² 'But what is indisputably true is this: that in 1945 she had a novel "half-finished", and that this was *Le Revenant*, which was the first version of *Wide Sargasso Sea*.' Angier, p. 371.
- ³ Angier, p. 476.
- ⁴ See for example the comprehensive *Bibliography of Women Writers From the Caribbean (1831-1986)*, by Brenda F. Berrian and Aart Broek (Washington: Three Continents Press, 1989), as a source for Caribbean women's writing in a variety of published forms throughout the regions of the Caribbean.
- ⁵ The term 'hidden history' and the Chapter's title are taken from Sheila Rowbotham's *Hidden From History: 300 Years of Women's Oppression and the Fight Against It*, third edn (London: Pluto, 1977; first edition published 1973).
- ⁶ Joan Anim-Addo, 'Anguish and the Absurd: Key Moments and the Emergence of New Figures of Black Womanhood', unpublished paper given to the 1996 International Conference of Caribbean Women Writers and Scholars, April 26, 1996, Florida International University, Miami.
- ⁷ Evelyn O'Callaghan, *Woman Version: Theoretical Approaches to West Indian Fiction by Women* (London: Macmillan Caribbean, 1993), p. 16.
- ⁸ Alastair Hennessy, 'Preface', in *Caribbean Transactions: West Indian Culture in Literature*, by Renu Jeneja (London: Macmillan, 1996), p. iv.
- ⁹ Maya Jaggi, 'The New Brits on the Block', *Guardian*, 13 July 96, p. 31. Jaggi does not acknowledge the source of her statistics. The figure of 130 would appear to correspond exactly to Ramchand's year by year bibliography of novels published in Britain between 1903 and 1967, which he compiled and published as an Appendix to *The West Indian Novel and its Background* in the late 1960s. His second edition expands the list to include more recently attributed novels up to 1982 (Ramchand's lists from both editions are reproduced in Appendix 4).
- ¹⁰ See Tillie Olsen, 'One Out of Twelve: Writers Who are Women in Our Century - 1971', in *Silences* (London: Virago Press, 1980), pp. 22-46.
- ¹¹ Daryl Cumber Dance, *New World Adams: Conversations with Contemporary West Indian Writers* (Leeds: Peepal Tree, 1984), p. 118.
- ¹² Carole Boyce Davies and Elaine Fido Savory, *Out of the KUMBLA* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1990); Evelyn O'Callaghan, *Woman Version: Theoretical Approaches to West Indian Fiction by Women* (London:

Macmillan, 1993); Selwyn R. Cudjoe, ed., *Caribbean Women Writers: Essays From the First International Conference* (Wellesley: Calaloux, 1990).

- ¹³ Of the recently available studies of relevance to this project, women authors covered are invariably those which were published in the 1980s: Sushelia Nasta's *Motherlands: Black Women's Writing from Africa, the Caribbean and South Asia* (London: Women's Press, 1991), covers work by Rhys and Caribbean women writers publishing in the 1980s, such as Joan Riley and Jamaica Kincaid. Frank Birbalsingh's *Frontiers of Caribbean Literature in English* (London: Macmillan, 1996), includes material on Lorna Goodison, Jamaica Kincaid, Dionne Brand.
- ¹⁴ This refers to a 'Chronology' of events in Douglas Tallack, *Twentieth-Century America: The Intellectual and Cultural Context* (London, Longman, 1991), pp.335-368, in which he situates cultural production alongside important historical and political events.
- ¹⁵ Rosalind Edwards, 'Connecting Method and Epistemology: A White Woman Interviewing Black Women', *Women's Studies International Forum*, 13, 1990, 477-490.
- ¹⁶ Edwards, p. 479.
- ¹⁷ Reference to the author's entries on Joyce Gladwell, Gloria Escoffery and Barbara Ferland in forthcoming: Daniel Balderston, Ana Lopez, Mike Gonzalez, eds. *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Latin American Culture* (London: Routledge).
- ¹⁸ Compare Selwyn Cudjoe's *Caribbean Women Writers: Essays from the First International Conference* (Wellesley: Calaloux, 1990), p. 4, with Sushelia Nasta's essay on 'The English Speaking Caribbean' in Claire Buck, *The Bloomsbury Guide to Women's Literature* (London: Bloomsbury, 1992), p. 160. Janice Shinebourne appears as the author of 'Rainsplitter in the Zodiac Garden (1977)' in Sarah Richardson, Merylyn Cherry, Sammy Palfrey, eds. *Writing on the Line: 20th Century Working Class Women Writers* (London: Working Press, 1996), p. 60.
- ¹⁹ Sandra Barnes, unpublished paper 'Theses/Dissertations on Caribbean Women Writers: an assessment and annotated bibliography' debated the haphazard nature of recuperative bibliographical research. Presented at the 1996 International Conference of Caribbean Women Writers and Scholars, Florida International University, April 24 -27, 1996. For further information or contributions to the database contact address: Sandra Barnes, Main library, The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago.
- ²⁰ Ramchand's 'Year-by-year' bibliography, which he compiled and published in the late 1960s, names four women novelists: Allfrey, Quayle, Wynter and Rhys, though this was expanded in the 2nd edition published in 1985 (see Appendix 4). Edward Kamau Brathwaite's essay 'West Indian Prose Fiction

in the Sixties: A survey' discusses 70 publications and also mentions five women writers: Bennett, Allfrey, Rhys and Wynter. Bruce King's 1995 revised edition of *West Indian Literature* contains an essay by Edward Baugh 'The sixties and the seventies' (pp. 63-76). Baugh chooses not to mention Sylvia Wynter's *The Hills of Hebron* in his tribute to 'outstanding first novels' produced in this period.

- ²¹ Elizabeth Coatsworth (born Buffalo, New York, 1893) author of *Lonely Maria* (1967); Dorothy Clewes (born Nottingham, 1932) author of *Peter and the Jumbie* (1969); and Mary Cockett (born Yorkshire, 1915) author of *Another Home, Another Country* (1972); are listed in the Commonwealth Institute Library Services, *Caribbean Writing: A Checklist, No.4* (Commonwealth Institute Library, Kensington High Street, London, 1986). I eventually found bibliographical entries for them in D.L.Kirkpatrick's *Twentieth Century Children's Writers* (London: Macmillan, 1978).
- ²² Mary Chamberlain, ed., *Writing Lives: Conversations Between Women Writers* (London: Virago, 1988), p. ix.
- ²³ Edwards, p. 478.
- ²⁴ As an example, during a passing conversation over the bookstall at the Caribbean Women Writers' Alliance conference at Goldsmiths in 1996, novelist Vernella Fuller described how the art work on the jackets of her two novels suggested a content quite different to that of the actual text. Using her own work as an example, we identified a trend in the publishing of Caribbean women's adult fiction in which cover illustrations portray the work as childlike and unsophisticated, and as having a possible child or adolescent audience. See, Sandra Courtman, 'Review of *In Praise of Love and Children*', *Mango Season*, 6 (1996) (p. 6).
- ²⁵ David Dabydeen and Nana Wilson-Tagoe, *A Reader's Guide to West Indian and Black British Literature* (London: Hansib, 1988), p. 45.
- ²⁶ Edwards, p. 485.
- ²⁷ Edwards, p. 485.
- ²⁸ Andrew Salkey died on April 28, 1995. His obituary was written by Jessica Huntley and appeared in *The Guardian* on May 1, 1995. In spite of her profound grief at the loss of lifelong friend and supporter, Jessica Huntley agreed to be interviewed on June 5th. I was indebted to Dr Walmsley for sending me a photocopy of the obituary prior to preparation for the Huntley interview.
- ²⁹ Hazel Carby, 'White women listen! Black feminism and the boundaries of sisterhood' in Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, *The Empire Strikes Back: Race and Racism in 70s Britain* (London: Routledge, 1992; first published Hutchinson, 1982), pp. 212-236 (p. 213).

- ³⁰ See Chapter 6, section 4.
- ³¹ Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*, rev. edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988; first published 1978). p. 119.
- ³² For example, it is unlikely that Beryl Gilroy would have agreed to an interview without Anne Walmsley's intervention and recommendation. Dr Gilroy informed me and that she had only agreed to do so because one of her oldest friends (Anne Walmsley) had requested it. Once contact was made it lead to introductions and gradually the circle widened. It was obvious from a number of comments that I was being assessed between interviews. This applied equally to the Caribbean writers' fraternity and the protagonists of the Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers. A number of comments reminded me that I was working in the light of their previous (often perceived as negative) experience of research students.
- ³³ Thompson, p.20.
- ³⁴ Thompson, p.130.
- ³⁵ See for example: Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques* (Newbury Park California; London: Sage, 1990).
- ³⁶ O'Callaghan, p. 23
- ³⁷ Kenneth Ramchand, *The West Indian Novel and its Background* (London: Faber and Faber, 1970), p. 6.
- ³⁸ See David Ellis, 'Writing Home: Black Writing in Britain Since the War', unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Essex, 1994.

CHAPTER 2

WRITERS' ORGANISATIONS, NETWORKS AND PATRONS IN BRITAIN, IN THE 1950s, 1960s AND 1970s

In a now familiar argument, Marjorie Thorpe iterates the concerns of feminist critics and historians 'to reconstruct female experience previously hidden or overlooked'.¹ Women writers in the 1960s and '70s were working against a 'male cultural hegemony' which contributed to a paucity of certain types of published writing by West Indian women at this time.² There is a need to explore how networks which formed to promote marginalised expression dealt with female contributions and experience, and in particular, to recover women's involvement in two very different literary/cultural movements which came into existence in that period in order to counter denial by mainstream critics and to challenge notions of a middle-class cultural consensus. The two main areas of interest to emerge are how social practices engender the experience of writing, and how race and class struggles intersect to provide a uniquely expressive space for female migrant writers. The following sections attempt to make connections between historical, psychological and cultural factors which may have impinged on the creativity of women members of these groups. Equally important, however, as Elaine Savory Fido postulates, is 'to find out what encourages writing'.³

The autobiographies (and much of the poetry) presented in this thesis proclaim West Indian women writers' quests for identity. A British context for the production of this writing has received scant analysis. Specifically, this chapter attempts to understand how West Indian women writers sought a *public* sphere for expression which more often than not had remained private in a pre-feminist literary era. Women writers have always privately expressed those parts of their experience which are denied, but, importantly, pioneering West

Indian women (with few role-models and writing in shadows cast by patriarchy) sought *publication* for their material. Tillie Olsen and Joanna Russ have revealed some of the historical conditions which have suppressed women's writing, but we need to continue their attention to circumstances which shape women's development. This chapter will suggest how the networks and organisations in the West Indies and Britain formed to promote artistic expression sometimes inspired, and sometimes delayed or inhibited, the production of women's writing, and it deals with the development of two distinct, though not homogenous or exclusive, groups of migrant writers. Section 1 gives a brief account of some of the post-war features of migration to explain why formal and informal structures were needed to support West Indian writers who felt justifiably alienated by the British experience. Section 2 and 3 discuss the aspirations of a relatively small group of Caribbean women artists, intellectuals and writers in Britain. Women's involvement in writers' networks in the 1950s and 1960s is revealed through a series of interviews, and is supported by a gendered reading of accounts of the BBC's *Caribbean Voices* programme and Anne Walmsley's history of The Caribbean Artists Movement. By the 1970s, the majority group of economic migrants, and their British second generation offspring had organised their diasporic communities to facilitate spiritual and cultural expression. Section 4 explains that - what is little known but of interest to this thesis - 'ordinary' women migrants also participated in the British Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers. In the main, then, this chapter traces the influence of writers' organisations and networks on West Indian women, but Section 5 further recognises the effects of individual patronage on writers.

2.1 Post-war Patterns of Migration to Britain from the West Indies

Men and women from the British West Indies were mobilised by patriotism to serve in both World Wars, and the initial phase of large-scale migration to

Britain followed their contribution to the Second World War. Many joined up in response to advertisements which told them that 'The Mother Country Needs You!', and it was held that 'from 1939 to 1945 a woman's place was in the war'.⁴ West Indian women professionals were systematically targeted for recruitment to the Auxiliary Territorial Service. When the female recruits arrived in Britain, they were often assigned the stereotypical role of black domestic, cooking and cleaning in the NAAFI. However, many West Indian women also fought institutional racism to be allowed to serve in front-line regiments. For example, Lilian Bader's autobiography, *Service in the WAAF: 431143 Sir!*, which she has (to date) failed to publish would publicise her struggle to join the Women's Royal Airforce.⁵ In spite of their experience of racial discrimination during the war, service recruits went home to a quieter, rather less exciting lifestyle and when Churchill visited the West Indies and encouraged former recruits to return to Britain, many did so willingly. They were persuaded once more, as in the War years, by newspapers like *The Jamaica Gleaner* to fill labour shortages and to rebuild Britain's bomb sites. The extent of 'the problem' was reflected in Ministry of Labour statements that, in 1956, job vacancies were running at 934,111, and by 1960 there were still 848,542 unfilled jobs.⁶ Thus began an escalation of West Indian migration which was famously satirised through the vernacular humour of Louise Bennett:

An week by week dem shippin off
Dem countrymen like fire,
Fe immigrate an populate
De seat a de Empire.⁷

However, the rebuilding of Britain took place against the impending loss of empire, and the sheer scale of the immigration of empire subjects produced a crisis in nationalist consciousness. In 1958, a growing tension erupted in violent clashes between black and white on the streets of Nottingham and Notting Hill.

Such a public display of racism deeply shocked the West Indian community which, unlike the African-Americans, had no such collective experience. This phase marked the West Indians' part in the beginning of a critical development in post-war British consciousness which Rushdie has described as 'a crisis of the whole culture, of a society's entire sense of itself. And racism is only the most clearly visible part of this crisis, the tip of the kind of iceberg that sinks ships.'⁸ The late 1950s and early '60s have come to represent a significant stage in black/white relationships which were based on ignorance and a profound clash of expectations. For the majority of black migrants, in addition to practical problems associated with their exclusion, there was also loneliness and disillusionment to contend with on arrival in the motherland. Britons demonstrated an historical amnesia which had long justified the oppression of empire subjects. These baffling 'coloured connections' were to become associated with social problems from the outset, and the women were forced to organise both against the ignorance of racism and the oppression of sexism.⁹

Although the first wave of migration was male-dominated, by 1955 there were approximately the same percentage of male and female West Indians entering Britain. The 'long five years' passed in which it was supposed that partners would return, so that many women travelled to Britain to join partners and families. Women were also recruited directly to nurse-training schemes promoted, somewhat ironically, in the West Indies by the then Minister of Health, Enoch Powell.¹⁰ A number of 'middle-class West Indians came to university, including for the first time a significant number of women.'¹¹ Colonial students found a social and intellectual meeting-place at The British Council Hostel at Hans Crescent in London which provided an important cultural space in which they felt relatively safe. This meeting of minds was temporarily to nurture some pioneering West Indian scholars and intellectuals. Although not students themselves, aspiring novelists Sam Selvon and George Lamming found accommodation at Hans Crescent when they first arrived with their unpublished

manuscripts. Selvon satirised the difference between students and the ordinary 'hustlers' which people the *The Lonely Londoners*. Moses tells Galahad:

'Don't talk to me about students,' [...] 'Them fellars have their bread buttered back from home, they ain't come to Brit'n to hustle like you and me. They spend a few years here, learn a profession, then go back home stupider than when they come'.¹²

But for even quite a disparate group of migrants, whether they were students, 'hustlers' or aspiring novelists, there was a prevailing reality: that living in the West Indies provided too few opportunities. V.S. Naipaul summarises the situation candidly: 'For nothing was created in the British West Indies, no civilisation as in Spanish America, no great revolution as in Haiti or the American colonies.'¹³ Migration reached a peak in the mid-'50s when there were tens of thousands of West Indians entering Britain. That experience has been depicted in the well-known fictive accounts by Selvon, Lamming and Naipaul, and fiction inevitably skews the picture in the favour of the male hero. Typically, Selvon's women characters are comic creations, peripheral to the development of the plots except as tokens of exchange between the adventurers, and there only to be outwitted, hustled for a free meal and a warm bed. Until recently, women's accounts of their experience have remained almost totally obscured, and fictional accounts of arrival and settlement by West Indian women are widely thought to be non-existent. However, during our discussions, Beryl Gilroy revealed that she wrote her little-known novel of migration, *In Praise of Love and Children*, in the 1960s. We might now look to Gilroy's novel to provide a rare fictional representation of the experience of arrival and settlement from a young female protagonist's point of view. In the novel, it is Melda Hayley who arrives alone in Britain in the 1950s. For those readers who know their Selvon, the setting is familiar, but the woman's commentary is highly unusual:

I stood on Paddington station amongst its swarming life - unbelieving, yet conscious of a boundless joy. My breath came softly, slowly to form the words, ' At last! I'm here! I've come! We're together London and I.' But where was Arnie, my brother, who had left us six years earlier to fill a menial niche here? He had promised to meet me? Now where was he? On Nation Time perhaps - that indefinite time, when we renounced the clock and came and went as we liked! The sun was our clock at home but there was no sun in this English August. I craned my neck to see through any break in the frenetic panorama, my doubts whipped up like wind-blown water.¹⁴

This passage serves as a register of some of the important features of migration. Gilroy articulates much that typifies the third passage for all migrants: the tension produced by a long-awaited anticipation of a welcoming motherland; the immediate awareness of a mismatch between the perception of an England acquired through the school book and the actual physical reality; Melda's grasp of the difference between industrial and agrarian concepts of time; the colourless climate which muddies perception; the missing male; the joy and hopes of a resilient young generation which also resonate with 'doubts whipped up like wind-blown water'.

Gilroy recounts how the manuscript for *In Praise ...* was returned by several publishers during the 1960s, to eventually find a publisher in 1996. Gilroy and other women wrote to counter their feelings of loneliness but much of that expression was not released until many years later. In a situation which parallels that of the availability of published creative writing, the history of women's experience of migration is not widely available until the early 1980s when the British women's presses promoted historical and cultural writings from a woman's perspective.¹⁵ Once released, that story was not, on the whole, a happy one as Esme Lancaster remembers, 'when we first came here let me cry (sic) for months and months.'¹⁶ Rushdie writes of the migrants' capacity for a 'double perspective: because they, we, are at one and the same time insiders and outsiders in this society'.¹⁷ As part of the argument which might be employed to refute a lack of creative expression from women migrant writers, Kristeva asserts that it is

this situation of loss and uncertainty that provides the prerequisite to the act of creative writing:

I would say that the creative act is released by an experience of depression without which we would not call into question the stability of meaning or the banality of expression. A writer must at one time or another have been in a situation of loss - of ties, of meaning - in order to write.

There is nevertheless something paradoxical about a writer, who experiences depression in its most acute and dramatic form, but who also has the possibility of lifting her/himself out of it.¹⁸

Migrant writers experienced this paradox in which they suffered the depression associated with a traumatic loss of social connections but also acquired a 'double perspective' and the need to find a means to 'lift her/himself out of it'. The following sections depict the alliances that writers made in the 1950s, '60s and '70s to facilitate the release of expression, and specifically describes how women writers fared within the supportive framework of these alliances.

2.2 The BBC Radio Broadcasts of *Caribbean Voices*

London in the 1950s saw informal networks of Caribbean writers, artists and cultural activists meeting to debate, cajole and criticise each other. Such aspiring novelists as Selvon and Lamming had come to Britain to seek publication for pre-existing manuscripts which were accepted without too much difficulty. They survived (if only minimally) on their earnings from writing and freelance work for the BBC Caribbean Service and many productive associations were achieved through these earlier contacts with the BBC's *Caribbean Voices* and The Caribbean Service.¹⁹ V.S. Naipaul went on to become the editor of the programme, taking over from Henry Swanzy and he describes how the service operated as a literary 'club', which was in many ways a precursor to The Caribbean Artists Movement for London-based writers:

The Caribbean Service was on the second floor of what had been the Langham Hotel, opposite Broadcasting House. On this floor the BBC had set aside a room for people like me, 'freelances'.... People were in and out of the freelances' room while I typed. Some would have dropped by at the BBC that afternoon for the company and the chat, and the off-chance of a commission by a producer for some little script.... The freelances' room was like a club: chat, movement, the separate anxieties of young or youngish men below the passing fellowship of that room.... And I benefitted from the fellowship of the room that afternoon. Without that fellowship and without the response of the three men [John Stockbridge, Andrew Salkey, Gordon Woolford] who read the story, I might not have wanted to go on with what I had begun. I passed the three typed sheets around.²⁰

The BBC fraternity operated effectively to encourage a group of new West Indian writers and to increase opportunities for contact with the London literary intelligentsia and with publishers. But 'the club' as described above, was typically male-oriented, revolving around 'the separate anxieties of young or youngish men'. The position of editor was held by a succession of men, in spite of the fact that the service had evolved as a direct result of Una Marson's pioneering war-time broadcasts to the Caribbean. A number of women (now largely forgotten) contributed to *Caribbean Voices*: Louise Bennett, Gloria Escoffery, Barbara Ferland, Vivette Hendriks, Constance Hollar, Mary Lockett, Una Marson, Stella Mead, Daisy Myrie, Dorothy Phillips.²¹ Gloria Escoffery and Pauline Henriques broadcast in London, but the majority of women contributors were isolated, sending in work through Caribbean-based agents, and they had little experience of being part of a 'fellowship' of writers. Typically, in the 1950s, Barbara Ferland sent poetry in from Jamaica through the agent Cedric Lindo but was distanced from the group that met at the BBC in London. During my interview with Ferland, I explored whether she had benefited from the activities of any kind of literary club, in the sense that Naipaul depicted above.²² The critical difference was that, although she was stimulated by her involvement with writers in Jamaica, she did not present her work for discussion.²³ Ferland described how she was undoubtedly inspired by her contact with the writers and

artists she came into contact with during her work, from 1948 to 1960, as secretary to the music officer at The British Council in Kingston. This social contact included listening to a recording of Dylan Thomas's *Under Milk Wood*, in the auspicious company of Derek Walcott. However, Ferland could never conceive of herself as a 'serious' writer or present her work to Walcott or Naipaul:

- BF Derek Walcott was an exceptional young man [...]
SC Did he read your work?
BF No!
SC You didn't think to show it to him?
BF No... I couldn't. And Vidia Naipaul, he was another one I knew very well.
SC But they didn't know you were writing?
BF I think they were so involved in their own creative work. Oh no.²⁴

As a woman, then, Ferland did not participate in the 'club' of aspiring writers in quite the same way as the men, nor indeed did she aspire to be a professional writer in the same way as her male contemporaries. On occasions when her male contemporaries read and discussed each other's work, she remained silent about her own writing. By the time Ferland arrived in London in 1960, *Caribbean Voices* had ended and her priorities were domestic: 'I wrote a bit but I was being a woman.'²⁵ She did not have any contact with the London-based Caribbean Artists Movement even though she would have had friends amongst its membership. In England, she became isolated from the group of writers and artists that she had socialised with and admired in Jamaica and she gave up attempts to publish poetry until 1994.

2.3 The Caribbean Artists Movement (CAM) 1966 - 1972, and the Women's Contribution

By the time The Caribbean Artists Movement was formed, access to publication should (theoretically) not have been a problem. By 1969, 90 million books were being sold each year and publishers were willing to take risks with new authors and markets.²⁶ The 1950s and '60s had demonstrated, through its love-affair with working-class fiction and film, that writing about certain types of 'real' experience was ripe for commodification. As a case in point, Donald Hinds was an aspiring but quite unknown writer, working as a bus conductor and occasional journalist for the *West Indian Gazette*, when he was commissioned to write a book that would describe the experiences of West Indians in Britain. With hindsight, it might appear that Hinds' *Journey to an Illusion* (1966) merely confirmed the desperate circumstances that many immigrants were facing (and which prevented their return to the West Indies) which many of the host culture misunderstood. In Britain, the crisis in consciousness which Rushdie identified above increased the market for text books for social workers and those in the public sector that confronted the task of helping large numbers of immigrants seeking work, accommodation and childcare. Additionally, publishers were also aware of the need in the West Indies for new fictional material, especially for children and the educational market. 'Serious' mainstream publishers were open to new 'black' voices and Diana Athill, as the Editorial Director for Deutsch, nurtured the talents of V.S. Naipaul, Michael Anthony, Jean Rhys and Merle Hodge.²⁷ But even given this positive publishing climate, the production of new writing was not being matched by the critical attention that it warranted. Anne Walmsley summarises the conditions which promoted the formation of CAM:

By the mid-1960s, a substantial quantity of West Indian fiction, and some poetry of quality, had been published; several plays by West Indian writers had been successfully performed on the London stage. But their work seemed to be drawing less attention from British critics than in the 1950s, and no West

Indian critics were yet being published or heard. Several gifted and single-minded West Indian artists were producing work of high quality, but it too suffered from the lack of informed assessment. There was an evident and urgent need for criticism, and critical criteria which were appropriate to West Indian art, for an aesthetic which was no longer tied to European art.²⁸

It is difficult, in retrospect, to gauge the extent to which this lack of critical attention was a feature of the marginalisation of black expression by the mainstream or part of a more general trend. Patricia Waugh attributes a 'critical indifference to contemporary writing' in this period, to commercially-driven cultural activity and to the increasing specialisation of academic discourse.²⁹ Nevertheless, the quest for a new aesthetic which would regard West Indian work as more than a commodity, instigated the formation of The Caribbean Artists Movement. The movement was formally convened at its first 'official' meeting, in December 1966, in Edward and Doris Brathwaite's London flat.

Walmsley's *The Caribbean Artists Movement 1966 - 1972: A Literary and Cultural History* reconstructs the course of the movement. What is interesting, and in many ways typical of the women members' self-effacement, is the way in which Walmsley obscures the extent to which this analysis was made possible only because of her own involvement. Her ambiguous position, as author of the history and as a founder member of the movement, is disguised by a narrative style in which it is not made clear that the history is being narrated, not by a detached researcher seeking to recover the course of the movement, but from an insider's point-of-view. Yet it is, in fact, the availability of Walmsley's 'insider' point-of-view, with its behind-the-scenes knowledge of the women's contribution, which engenders her account of the movement, since a reliance on the 'official' version of events would mostly reveal the developments spearheaded by its dominant males.

Walmsley's partisanship should be explained: she was, from the outset, a committed member of The Caribbean Artists Movement. Though she was born in Staffordshire, her experience of teaching in Jamaica stimulated an interest in

Caribbean culture, particularly art and literature. Walmsley was an important member who took notes and made audio-recordings, and she provided the venue for some meetings at her London flat. In the 1980s, the history of the movement became the focus of her doctoral research. The project spanned several years during which Walmsley, as someone well-respected within the movement, was able to collect and interpret the oral testimonies of members and associates. The research was intended to address the absence of CAM from 'Cultural histories of the period of Britain and The Caribbean.'³⁰ The back of the book introduces Walmsley's analysis of the achievements and failures of the movement in a way that suggests that the movement was founded *by men for men*. This extract will serve as an example:

CAM's founders were Edward Kamau Brathwaite, John La Rose and Andrew Salkey. [...] Established writers and artists active with CAM from the beginning included CLR James, Wilson Harris, Ronald Moody, Aubrey Williams; amongst up and coming writers and critics who took part were Orlando Patterson, Kenneth Ramchand, Gordon Rohlehr, Ivan Van Sertima, Louis James; younger members who valued the CAM experience were James Berry, Linton Kwesi Johnson, Christopher Laird, Errol Lloyd.³¹

Women's involvement in the movement is entirely absent from the 400-word 'advertisement' for the book and the abstract provides no indication of the way in which Caribbean cultural expression and gender politics produced contradictions that surface throughout Walmsley's history. However, a potential buyer flicking through the photographs of CAM public meetings would quickly find evidence of a gender dimension which signals a hidden history for the organisation of CAM. As an example, a photograph of founder-member Edward Kamau Brathwaite's address (in 1971) on 'New Cultural Signals in the Caribbean' is presumably included to show his ability to attract and sustain an audience for CAM meetings.³² But a second photograph of the proceedings reveals the contrasting postures of two members, Bernard and Phyllis Coard: he is clearly concentrating on Brathwaite while she seems to be wholeheartedly focused on making or

repairing a baby's garment. The photograph might suggest that the women members were present merely as partners and in discussion with Walmsley, I enquired if women's contribution to CAM was restricted to 'making the tea' at meetings. Walmsley replied 'Oh it was rather like that.'³³ However, CAM was a far cry from the exclusively male 'club' that is suggested by the text of the book's cover; Walmsley meticulously documents the many contributions of the women involved, either directly as artists, writers, performers and academics, or, more indirectly, as wives and partners of CAM leading-lights. The significance of CAM's stimulus on its women members is also revealed by Walmsley's exhaustive interviews, the transcripts of which provide some indication of how gender operated within the organisation to delay the development of some of the women members. Yvonne Sobers, for example, maintains that she was inspired by attending meetings with the CAM group with its open discussion of influences, experimentation, form and style:

Anne Walmsley: And in what sort of ways do you feel CAM has remained with you, has influenced you, after those meetings?

Yvonne Sobers: I think one of the ways is one that just struck me: the fact that subsequently, but a very long time after, I myself started writing creatively. [...] Privately, mainly, but, well, I've got a short story published in *Focus* '83.³⁴

Sobers places a high value on being privy to work in progress both from new and established writers, and on 'getting an understanding of how people write.' The public opportunity to explore what is rarely available - that is, the writing *process* rather than the finished product - might have been expected to stimulate Sobers, but her creative writing was delayed until some time after her involvement with CAM. As another example of a writer who has since published in her own right, Christine Craig remembered being 'very interested in Caribbean writers; not that I was ever planning to be one myself. I was just "the audience".'³⁵ Craig had attended readings by Wilson Harris and Orlando Patterson, and was profoundly

affected by them. In 1971, she returned to Jamaica and, like many of her contemporaries, was torn between a need to withdraw into the therapeutic activity of writing and 'the pull' of urgently needed practical projects to rebuild Jamaica. Andrew Salkey encouraged her to write: 'Start where you are, at the kitchen table, if that is what you have got.'³⁶ In retrospect, Craig considers this encouragement to have been 'a very very serious turning point' in her ability to begin to conceive of herself as a writer.³⁷

Socio-historical and psychological features emerge from Walmsley's interviews with CAM women: a delay in or denial of writing; a sacrifice of personal expression for the good of the movement, for the community, or, more specifically, for the support of partners; women's rejection of individual (literary) expression in favour of more politicised art-forms, exemplified by the experimental work of Sistren Collective and the Yard Theatre. As specific examples of these responses, Craig and Sobers perceive themselves, from the outset, as 'the audience' not as potential public artists or writers; and the delay in writing slows down their progress. Craig describes her writing as 'secretive and diffident', as a forbidden activity in need of self-censorship, and admits to guilt resulting from wishing to write rather than 'fixing roads'. The political turmoil in Jamaica left her feeling that 'there seemed no place in it for somebody to be writing poetry', a feeling which required the approval of an established writer (and typically a patriarch) like Salkey to dissipate. Craig may well have had her inspiration kindled by her early association with CAM, but the delay between writing and publication is characteristic of many of the women in this study, for she did not publish a collection of poetry until 1984, when the environment for women's expression was much changed. Craig was writing in the 1960s, but it was the validation provided by Sistren and the women's symposium at the Barbados Carifesta that appeared to give her the confidence to go public with her work.³⁸

Writing of the significance of The Caribbean Artists Movement from the perspective of the late 1980s, Walmsley confronts the ambivalent position of its women members and hers is, to date, the (sole) authoritative history of the movement. In her final chapter entitled 'Postscript', she assesses the contribution of women, some of whom have little in the way of publications or reputation to act as a retrospective record of their contributions. Walmsley writes: 'Of the women artists active in London at the time that CAM was formed, none was invited to the founding meetings,'³⁹ and thus she foregrounds the contributions of women members in order that their part in its history should not be entirely neglected.⁴⁰ She continues: 'The most valuable work by women for CAM was done by founding members' wives.'⁴¹ This 'behind-the-scenes' work included the vital task of disseminating information: it was Walmsley who published accounts of CAM's first two conferences and when the CAM treasurer pleads for help with administration the call was answered by her:

Oliver Clarke's public plea to conference participants for help with part at least of the CAM work carried by Doris Brathwaite - typing and dispatching notices of meetings, mailing newsletters and so on - was answered by Anne Walmsley.⁴²

The less glamorous clerical work undertaken by women members might easily have been left out of CAM's history by some other historian, but Walmsley had first-hand knowledge of its significance. Her following comment on John La Rose and the beginnings of CAM contains an important subtext:

La Rose had begun to think about publishing books in Trinidad in the 1940s and 1950s: new books, and also old books which were no longer freely available. He remembers British publishers rejecting a novel by John Wickham, although several of Wickham's stories had been successfully broadcast on the BBC's *Caribbean Voices* and on radio programmes in Trinidad. He decided 'not just to complain, but to do it oneself.' He recalls how Irma, his first wife, typed out books such as W. Arthur Lewis's *Labour in the West Indies* and JJ Thomas's *Creole Grammar* - a labour indeed on a

manual typewriter with carbon copies - so that he and his friends in Trinidad could read and discuss them.⁴³

Walmsley's judgement here is gendered: she contrasts La Rose's 'do it oneself' with a description of how this was, in actuality, achieved by Irma's labour on the manuscripts.⁴⁴ The two activities, equally important, are separated in Walmsley's description to reveal that Irma 'types' and John La Rose and friends 'discuss'. Here, Walmsley describes how Doris Brathwaite was kept too busy with a keyboard to consider her own creativity:

During the 1970s and early 1980s Savacou also published books.[...] This expansion was made possible largely because Doris Brathwaite had equipped herself early with word-processing and desktop publishing skills.⁴⁵

Though not a member of CAM, Barbara Ferland also drew on her secretarial experience to indicate one of the consequences of copy-typing:

SC And this [typing] stops women from writing?
BF Oh definitely! It is one thing I can say that I did work and I mean work. There were the music catalogues that were part of my job to do. Typing. And you become automatic almost with doing this, doing this, doing this. And physically you are very tired. But there is so much left in one.⁴⁶

As Ferland explains, the typist becomes an exhausted automaton, with little perception of herself as a possible *originator* of manuscripts.

The picture may be emerging of a group of selfless women working quietly behind the scenes whilst their men wrote and discussed novels and poetry. However, this type of subordination, which is often achieved by consent, was challenged by a number of CAM women. In addition to the quest for a literary aesthetic, other types of intellectual enquiry were debated at CAM meetings, especially the ground-breaking scholarship by Merle Hodge, Elsa Goveia and Lucille Mathurin-Mair. A number of CAM women concerned themselves exclusively with cultural forms which were performance-based rather than

literary (as did Brathwaite and Salkey). Doris Harper Wills, Pearl Connor, Judith Laird and Marina Maxwell, highly-educated themselves, worked with communicative forms that would connect with those West Indians lacking access to a European literary tradition. They found role-models in women such as the inspirational Trinidadian dancer, Beryl McBurnie. Women dramatists and performers worked on collaborative projects which would be available to the non-literary majority. As an example, Doris Harper Wills, who had lived in New York and been a member of the Harlem Writers Guild along with Rosa Guy and Paule Marshall, had no aspirations to become published, which would have involved her residing in America or Britain.⁴⁷ Speaking of her return to Guyana, she says: 'I mean in England to get published you have to go to many tea parties and meet people. But I'm a very busy person.'⁴⁸ Publishing contracts were often achieved in social settings, and some venues were less welcoming to women than to men. Whilst working for Longmans in the 1960s, Walmsley remarked on the 'pub' culture of her male colleagues which negatively affected women writers and denied them access to publishers. She recalled the following:

SC How much access to publishers did Caribbean writers have? How did they meet?

AW I don't know. At parties, night-clubs and pubs. It was a male thing. Even in publishing the men would go off to the pub and if I went I didn't feel welcome. I was intruding in their world. [...] Also the network of *Caribbean Voices* was where a lot of people met.⁴⁹

CAM women may have felt excluded from some networks and from male-dominated public spaces; however, women countered their exclusion by holding political and intellectual discussions of the type that were held in the private 'salon' of Marina Maxwell.⁵⁰

CAM's journal, *Savacou*, became the public space where much of this creative and critical activity was articulated, and was intended to be a 'a platform for the new creative writing, particularly by young urban blacks and by women'.⁵¹

As editor, Edward Kamau Brathwaite played a part in encouraging new women's voices, as did Andrew Salkey.⁵² James Berry was also conscious of women's position, and whilst secretary of CAM, proposed 'Caribbean women writers: How do they see their society?' as a topic for a CAM meeting.⁵³ However, in spite of the rhetoric, in practice the 176 pages of the 1970/71 *Savacou*, dedicated to 'New Writing 1970' contains no contributions by a woman.⁵⁴ By 1977, however, the women had their own complete issue, dedicated to 'Caribbean Woman', and which introduced⁵⁵

... significant women writers and critics who were to appear as a major feature of the 1980s: Jean Goulbourne, Marjorie Thorpe, Merle Hodge, Lorna Goodison, Judy Miles, Opal Palmer, Peta-Anne Baker, Christine Craig, Maureen Warner Lewis.⁵⁶

These are Caribbean women writers, some of whom attracted the type of critical attention that CAM came into existence for, but although they have their beginnings in CAM, they take many more years to develop an equivalent corpus and reputation than their male contemporaries.

2.4 'Blacks in Ivory Towers Can't Write about Ghettos': West Indian Women and The Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers.⁵⁷

Old Father to England in Winter '59
Cold bite him hard,
Make him bawl in his small basement room
By the Grove.
Every day he cry out:
"Man, a tekkin' de nex' boat back home."
But come Spring,
Old Father still here.⁵⁸

The majority of West Indians settled in a country which gave them few opportunities to articulate their cultural dislocation, and it was this silenced majority that concerned many CAM activists. Donald Hinds straddled these two worlds: between his London working-class community and the intellectual base of CAM. As such, his membership of CAM was unusual and, although self-taught, he remembered a divide which left him feeling 'completely lost when some of these people were talking.'⁵⁹ As one of the few working-class members of CAM, Hinds had real experience of problems - of racial exclusion compounded by class alienation - that many so-called 'ordinary immigrants' experienced in the early years of their settlement and which led them to identify with the white working-class. As Selvon observed:

It have a kind of communal feeling with the Working Class and the spades, because when you poor things does level out, it don't have much up and down. A lot of men get kill in war and leave widow behind, and it have bags of these old geezers who does be pottering about the Harrow Road like if they lost, a look in their eye as if the war happen unexpected and they still can't realise what happen to the old Brit'n.⁶⁰

That sense of fraternity was to prove fickle when, a decade after Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners*, London dockers and Smithfield meat-packers openly demonstrated their support for Enoch Powell's anti-immigration lobby. However, a challenge to a white, male, middle-class hegemony was to manifest itself (amongst other things) in the origins of a very different organisation to CAM. In 1976, exactly a decade later, the national Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers (FWWCP) was formed. Like CAM, it responded to equally complex post-war social, cultural and political developments which had increasingly threatened any notion of a cultural consensus. The year of its formation was, according to Patricia Waugh, a watershed year and her résumé of the significance of 1976 is useful here:⁶¹

It is this year more than any other perhaps which emerges as the moment when the culturally diasporic effects of the sixties gathered into combustion with the individualism and rising monetarist economics of the mid-seventies to bring an end to the stable foundation of cultural assumptions upon which had rested the apparently unified ideals of post-war collectivist social reform.⁶²

It was the challenge to 'cultural assumptions', inherent in the formation of the FWWCP, that created an environment which promoted the expression of 'ordinary' West Indian women writers in a quite unique way. A brief explanation of the ethos of the organisation is necessary in order to understand the conditions under which some of the writing presented much later in the thesis came to be generated.

Nine groups of writers formed the initial membership of the FWWCP, orchestrated by Chris Searle and Ken Worpole in 1976. The formation of the Federation was sparked by progressive educational, as well as cultural, concerns. Searle and Worpole demanded a curriculum for English teaching that would relate to the lives of working-class children and which would validate forms originating from that culture.⁶³ In a sense, their efforts mirrored those of teachers engaged in the process of 'Caribbeanising' the syllabi in newly independent ex-colonies. In Britain, at the same time, Beryl Gilroy and Petronella Breinburg, amongst others, were producing what was then considered radical writing for children. There was a general movement, both by school-teachers and those committed to new adult-literacy schemes, to empower their students through creative expression. Diverse voices - regional, foreign and ungrammatical - became the subjects of development rather than eradication. In opposition to this celebration of 'difference', were deeply entrenched traditions resting on a hierarchical cultural model, based on notions of a 'correct' standard of English and of 'the tradition' of English Literature. By 1982, the anarchic implications of dismantling long-held values were being felt by the 'old school' of English

teachers. In the *Observer*, John Rae, then Headmaster of Westminster School, articulated the connection between 'rules of grammar' and social rules:

There is a further claim that can be made for the restoration of the teaching of correct English. Attention to the rules of grammar, or care in the choice of words encourages punctiliousness in other matters. That is not just an intellectual conceit. The overthrow of grammar coincided with the acceptance of the equivalent of 'creative writing' in social behaviour. As nice points of grammar were mockingly dismissed as pedantic and irrelevant, so was punctiliousness in such matters as honesty, responsibility, property, gratitude, apology and so on.⁶⁴

Rae was swimming against a tide which would have little impact on his own Westminster schoolchildren, but the state system had failed an alarming number of adults who were leaving school with poor reading skills. National research into literacy needs revealed the extent of a problem which meant, importantly, that the funds suddenly became available for projects specifically targeted at adults:

At the beginning of 1975, central government, through the National Institute of Adult Education, established an Adult Literacy Resource Agency (ALRA) for one year only, with powers to administer a grant of £1 million for the financial year 1975-76, to help local authorities and others meet the expected initial increase in demand for adult literacy...⁶⁵

Federation groups funded as Adult Literacy projects - ironically, in order to standardise written English - were to provide West Indian women with opportunities for expression, including some first attempts at writing in Creole.

It would be misleading to suggest that the Federation began a mass movement in working-class writing groups since writing as a group activity clearly pre-exists the setting up of a national framework. The original nine member-groups were formed prior to 1976 as a result of a rent strike and industrial disputes; and groups such as Centreprise had been in existence as community publishers several years before they applied for Arts Council funding.⁶⁶ Membership attracted professionals, and especially teachers and

lecturers from working-class backgrounds. Using such professional expertise, Arts Council funding was sought to enable the Federation to have a full-time paid national coordinator (the Arts Council insisted on calling the post 'Literature Development Officer') and to fund the publication of its first anthology, *Writing*, in 1978.⁶⁷ The emphasis on working-class participation was not welcomed by the 1979 Literature Finance Committee, and the Federation's application was hotly debated as the product of a 'politically partisan and socially exclusive' organisation.⁶⁸

Federation groups went on to publish short stories and poems in small-scale community anthologies and poetry journals, and it was rare for a Federation writer to cross over into mainstream publishing. As Rebecca O'Rourke states: 'Within the Federation, there have been two novelists in twenty-one years - myself and Roger Mills.'⁶⁹ The organisation of these groups was not conducive to novel-writing, since unlike the more intellectual CAM, where meetings were focused on selected themes, novels or writers, Federation groups were organised democratically, in order to enable all members to read something short and receive comments on it.⁷⁰

This democratic forum typically provided a safe cultural space for a second generation of Caribbean-descended adolescents who, by the 1970s, had gone through a British education system which aligned cultural difference with a lack of intelligence; while ex-CAM secretary, James Berry, forged a productive link between Centreprise and the work of The Caribbean Artists Movement. This connection enabled him, as an established West Indian poet, to encourage Centreprise black poets and to include their work in his *Bluefoot* collections. Poetry proved to be an attractive form for West Indian women writers who joined the Federation, and Sandra Agard's 'In my corner', for example, was published in Centreprise's *Talking Blues*. During our discussion, Ken Worpole recalled that Agard was one of a group of 'very talented young black writers around Centreprise' in the mid-1970s.⁷¹

Initially groups were not determined by race or gender, since the notion of separate groups 'hadn't become an issue at the time'; but this was to change when a supposed unifying working-class alliance fragmented on gender and race issues.⁷² In addition to The Arts Council and adult literacy schemes, financial support for publications could also be attracted from organisations like the Southwark Race Equality Unit, so that, by 1984, the diasporic experience of migrants began to be represented in separatist anthologies such as *So This is England*, which was funded by Southwark and produced by a 'Black Studies Group'. The orthodoxy of early Federation membership demanded that members should be working-class at least in origin: groups applying to join were 'vetted' because West Indians from diverse cultural backgrounds had been de-classed in Britain and homogenised as disenfranchised 'immigrants', they were welcomed regardless of their original class status. This example, from a short story in a 1982 edition of *Voices*, illustrates how a change in social status combines with the host culture's ignorance to fracture the migrant writer's identity:

St Lucia is a tiny island in the West Indies. In London where I used to live, the white population considered all blacks to be Jamaican. But as a matter of fact it is further from Jamaica to St. Lucia, than from Liverpool to Warsaw. I can imagine what a Liverpuddlian would think if he went to live in Africa and everyone thought he was Polish - that the natives were bloody thick. Luckily the people of St. Lucia are more tolerant.

Angela came to London from St. Lucia when she married a man who'd been recruited by London Transport. Angela came from what we might see as a rather upper-class family and, labour being cheap there, her family had servants. So cooking and cleaning were just two of the totally new experiences offered her by London life. I think Angela's parents may have been rather shocked by her new husband taking her off to the mother country. No doubt, however, they didn't quite picture it the way it was. They pestered her for pictures of the house, but she couldn't very well send a picture of the walk-up flat, 1926 Corpy style for them to show round at home. So she send a picture of the local Catholic Church instead, as St. Lucians are nearly all Catholics.⁷³

It is the shift from first-person to third-person narration that creates a tension between the narrator's St Lucian identity and the reality of 'immigrant' life in 'a walk-up flat.' The passage juxtaposes the narrator's newly-acquired British societal place with the impossibility of disappointing her family back home. The story continues to relate instances of Angela's humiliation until, like Jean Rhys, she is forced to spend a night in a police cell for defending her family from a neighbour. She concludes: 'Well, you can't expect even St. Lucians to tolerate everything.'⁷⁴ By the end of the story Angela's cultured St Lucian identity has given way to pressure from conflicting expectations presented by a clash of cultures - a common experience for 'immigrants'. But the point here is that the writer, Caroline Williams, finds a means to express this 'double perspective' on British and St Lucian society through the public space of a Federation anthology. Other Federation anthologies included autobiographical accounts of the migration experience from Caribbean, African, Asian, Vietnamese, Italian, Chinese and Irish writers (see Appendix 5.4) and their writing generally witnessed a profound need to record their own, or their loved ones', departures and arrivals.

In the course of gathering material from Federation community publishers, it becomes clear that many 'ordinary' women migrants, and de-classed ones like Williams, sought the means to develop their creative writing, and as the above extract would suggest, some of it is compelling and uniquely informative. However, it is pointless to attempt, as the Arts Council's funding committee did, to judge its merits by Eurocentric literary standards. The real achievement of the Federation was its ability to create the conditions to release denied expression, in the form of oral history projects from groups marginalised by society (for example - immigrants and travellers), working-class creativity, and by projects which enabled adults to acquire help with expression and literacy. By facilitating the publication of the outcomes, the Federation validated a lived experience of 'difference', and provided an environment for women writers to explore that difference. West Indian women writers were doubly alienated by class and race

(and oppressed by their gender), and most would have found it difficult to imagine that their experiences were worth recording without the constructive criticism provided by Federation groups. A championing of denied experience, coupled with practical and critical skills, enabled the Federation groups to develop the voices of some of the West Indian women writers discussed in chapters 5 and 7. The success of this movement led Stuart Hall to express his 'amazement' in an interview with Anne Walmsley for her CAM history:

Europe has shunted culture off to one side. It's the higher arts. [...] And so what has happened since then, I think, has certainly amazed me and would have amazed, I think, anybody in that [first CAM] conference at the time: the notion of black school kids writing about their experience in poetry and so on.⁷⁵

In the above comment, Hall recognised the significance of working-class writing as part of a new type of ownership of a different, non-European, notion of culture.

2.5 West Indian Women Writers, Patrons and Publishers

The previous sections have explored the ways in which organisations provided a sort of collective patronage but it would be misleading to imply that all writers, even from marginalised factions, desire to produce their work as part of a group. They provide a type of intervention which certainly does not appeal to every aspiring writer and, even if it once did, writers who become established may wish to disassociate their achievements from anything collective. In spite of V.S. Naipaul's acknowledgement of the value of the *Caribbean Voices* fellowship, he chose to distance himself and his work from CAM, and the Nigerian writer, Buchi Emecheta, wrote her life story, *In the Ditch*, alone and unsupported.⁷⁶ However, writers have usually benefited from, or suffered the

withdrawal of the positive effects of individual patrons. For the majority of writers it requires the support that Rebecca O'Rourke, as a worker with Centreprise and as an author, has witnessed: 'It's often the intervention of a patron or champion of one kind or another that gives you ideas, supports you, sorts out some of the technical things.'⁷⁷ A gesture of confidence in the value of the work may prove critical to a writer's development, and this validation may come from different sources. In response to a question about positive influences, Joyce Gladwell wrote to me that it was Mervyn Morris's favourable comments on her manuscript of *Brown Face, Big Master* that encouraged her to submit it for publication. Donald Hinds also described Claudia Jones as 'my great mentor. She means so much to me, even now, looking back.'⁷⁸ Jones supported his apprenticeship as a writer, with assignments for the *West Indian Gazette*. It was from these writing tasks that Hinds found the inspiration and confidence to publish *Journey to an illusion*.

Patronage was critical to the career and status of Jean Rhys. Angier's biography of her provides an insight into the number of interventions which served to rescue her work, and so often rescued her, from poverty, alcoholism and ill-health. The publication of her early novels in the 1930s was achieved through the encouragement and patronage of Ford Madox Ford. In the 1960s, as director of Deutsch, Diana Athill (along with Francis Wyndham) convinced Rhys that *Wide Sargasso Sea* was worthy of publication. Getting the manuscript to completion was by no means an easy task. In an article, Athill wrote: 'I think there were many times during the months of discouragement and weariness following her illness when she [Rhys] faced the fact that it might never appear (I certainly did)'.⁷⁹ Much later, Rhys attracted the equally patient attempts of David Plante to transcribe and organise her unfinished autobiography.⁸⁰

Athill's dogged efforts with Rhys resulted in the completion of a novel which is now part of Caribbean literary history. She also promoted the career of another West Indian woman writer who went on to publish an important novel in this

period. Merle Hodge was fortunate to become her protégé when she lodged at Athill's house in London, an environment which was conducive to writing. Hodge recalls how it was Athill's encouragement that ensured that *Crick Crack, Monkey* was finished and published in 1970.⁸¹ Athill's comment to me in a letter underlines how accessible publishers and reviewers were to new voices, like Hodge's, at this time:

Merle Hodge was the only woman writer from the West Indies who came my way. [...] She had no difficulty finding a publisher (us -Andre Deutsch Ltd.) for *Crick Crack, Monkey*, and it was not for lack of encouragement from us or reviewers that she stopped writing.⁸²

A second little-known example is Phyllis Shand Allfrey's meeting with a woman literary agent at a London award ceremony after one of Allfrey's poems had won a competition run by the Society of Women Writers and Journalists. The literary agent's encouragement stimulated her to complete *The Orchid House* which, like Hodge's, was accepted for publication immediately.

Anne Walmsley's position, as the Caribbean editor for Longmans in the 1960s, ensured that she was in a position to nurture the newly-discovered talents of Beryl Gilroy and Jean D'Costa. However, during our discussion, Walmsley reflected on the tendency to encourage writing for children from West Indian women at that time:

What I was thinking was, of individual publishers in the old days. The way that Charles Monteith fostered these men from the Caribbean and I was thinking of the way Beryl Gilroy responded to me and you said 'Was I particularly interested in women writers?' I ought to have been. I ought to have said- I'm a woman publisher, I ought to encourage these women to get on and write. But I did for text books- I did a lot of that. Oh dear, talk about falling into the stereotypes- I encouraged Jean D'Costa to write for children- but I don't remember very much encouraging women to write fiction- I can't remember anybody who seemed interested in doing that really. There was an equivalent in Nelson and Heinemann- Longman, Nelson and Heinemann - we were all very active in the Caribbean period and they both had women publishers as well.⁸³

The commission, from a female publisher, to write text books and children's stories came during a period when Gilroy was experiencing a number of rejections for her adult fiction and poetry. Nevertheless, she regarded Walmsley's encouragement to write for children, not as limiting and stereotypical, but as critical in preventing her from abandoning writing for publication altogether.⁸⁴ Significantly, Gilroy and D'Costa feature in Appendix 5 as part of the evidence of a number of West Indian women writers who wrote for children and of how this resulted in a paucity of adult fiction by them. It is not insignificant that, whilst there was a marked male-domination of the adult fiction market during the 1960s, there were a number of women gaining positions of power in the publishing industry. The situation both provoked and enabled feminists, who were learning the business of publishing in the 1960s, to recover rejected manuscripts and out-of-print material for the women's presses of the 1970s. A pragmatic strain of feminism, combined with expertise developed in the process of working for mainstream publishers, enabled Carmen Callil to form 'Virago' in 1972:

What I really wanted to do was to make women's writing central to the canon of literary culture which was so absorbed by male writers. [...] I also wanted to provide a place for women to publish and be published in a context where others understood what they were writing about.⁸⁵

In this way, the women's presses proved that there was a mass-market for women's fiction, and went on to provide a type of patronage that would stimulate the next generation of Caribbean women writers and its attendant feminist critical attention.

- ¹ Marjorie Thorpe, 'Feminism and the Female Authored West Indian Novel: Paule Marshall's *Brown Girl, Brown Stones*', in *Gender in Caribbean Development*, ed. by Patricia Mohammed and Catherine Shepherd, reprint (Mona: The Institute of Social and Economic Research, 1991; first published by The University of West Indies Women and Development Studies Project, 1988), pp. 321-332 (p. 322).
- ² Shelia Rowbotham describes her discovery, in Karen Horney's *Feminine Psychology*, of what she already knew in daily practice but had never seen articulated: '...she described areas of experience I had never seen written down, but I hooked a lifetime of experiences suddenly on to her clear statement of male cultural hegemony.' in *Woman's Consciousness, Man's World* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973) p. 23.
- ³ Elaine Savory Fido, 'Where Do We Go From Here?' in *Gender in Caribbean Development*, ed. by Patricia Mohammed and Catherine Shepherd (Mona, Jamaica: University of West Indies, 1988), pp. 333-345 (p. 336).
- ⁴ Ben Bousquet, Colin Douglas, *West Indian Women at War: British Racism in World War II* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1991), p. 15.
- ⁵ See 'Lilian Bader - A Black British Experience', in *West Indian Women at War: British Racism in World War II* by Ben Bousquet and Colin Douglas (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1991) pp. 127-140. Liverpool-born Bader tells how, although her Jamaican father was killed in action in the first World War, she suffered several painful rejections before she was allowed to join the WAAF. A footnote to Lilian Bader's account refers to her unpublished autobiography written in 1988.
- ⁶ Ministry of Labour figures for job vacancies cited in 'Racism, employment and the Trade Unions: Migration', *Racism in the Workplace and Community* (Milton Keynes: The Open University Press, 1984), section 9, table 9.2, p. 2.
- ⁷ Louise Bennett, 'Colonization in Reverse', in *The Penguin Book of Caribbean Verse in English*, ed. by Paula Burnett (London: Penguin, 1986), pp. 32-33 (p. 32). First published in Louise Bennett, *Jamaica Labrish* (Kingston: Sangsters, 1966).
- ⁸ Salman Rushdie, 'The New Empire Within Britain', in *Imaginary Homelands, Essays and Criticism 1981 - 1991* (London: Penguin, 1991), pp. 129-139 (p. 129).
- ⁹ Beryl Gilroy used the term in an article in 1962, the year of the Immigration Act, in which she described the situation as '... the ordinary English person might any day wake up to find that his vague coloured connections have become a reality'. *Student Movement*, Spring 1962, pp. 6-9 (p. 6).
- ¹⁰ For an account of discriminatory practices, and of how the class dimension operated with respect to nurse training and West Indian recruits, see Ron

Ramdin, 'The Black Workers Industrial Struggle', in *The Making of The Black Working Class in Britain* (London: Wildwood, 1987; first published by Gower, 1987), pp. 256-370 and Beverley Bryan, Stella Dadzie and Suzanne Scafe, 'The Uncaring Arm of the State: Black Women, Health and the Welfare Services', in *The Heart of the Race: Black Women's Lives in Britain* (London: Virago, 1985), pp. 89-124.

- ¹¹ Anne Walmsley, *The Caribbean Artists Movement, 1966-1972: A Literary and Cultural History* (London, New Beacon, 1992), p. 4.
- ¹² Sam Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners* (London: Longman, 1985; first published by Alan Wingate, 1956), p. 133.
- ¹³ V. S. Naipaul, *The Middle Passage* (London: Penguin, 1969; first published, Deutsch, 1962), p. 27.
- ¹⁴ Beryl Gilroy, *In Praise of Love and Children* (Leeds: Peepal Tree, 1996), p. 8.
- ¹⁵ In work such as Selma James, ed. *Strangers and Sisters: Women, Race and Immigration* (Bristol: Falling Wall, 1985); Elyse Dodgeson's *Motherland: West Indian Women to Britain in 1950s* (London: Heinemann, 1984) and Bryan, Dadzie & Scafe, *The Heart of the Race*.
- ¹⁶ Esme Lancaster, transcript, *Birmingham Black Oral History Project* (Birmingham: Birmingham City Council and Race Relations Unit, 1992), p. 13.
- ¹⁷ Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands*, p. 19.
- ¹⁸ Philip Rice and Patricia Waugh, *Modern Literary Theory: A Reader* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 133.
- ¹⁹ The BBC Caribbean service operated from London to broadcast, poetry, short stories and critical debates back to the Caribbean. The service evolved from a programme produced by Una Marson who travelled to England in 1938 and worked for the BBC as a script-writer. Marson produced 'Calling the West Indies' during the Second World War which was conceived as a means for West Indian service people to keep in touch with families back home. In 1946, Henry Swanzy took over its production, which was by then a literary magazine called 'Caribbean Voices', drawing on material from the Caribbean and British-based writers. Subsequent editors were V.S. Naipaul and Edgar Mittelholzer before the programme stopped broadcasting in 1958.
- ²⁰ Naipaul is cited in Walmsley, pp. 11-12.
- ²¹ See John Figueroa, ed., *Caribbean Voices Volume I: Dreams and Visions* (London: Evans Brothers, 1966) and *Caribbean Voices Volume 2: The Blue Horizons* (London: Evans Brothers, 1970).

- 22 Author's interview with Barbara Ferland, Gerrards Cross, 12.2.97. See Appendix 3.5, p. 357.
- 23 Ferland, transcript p. 362.
- 24 Ferland, transcript p. 362.
- 25 Ferland, transcript p. 355.
- 26 Stuart Laing, 'The Production of Literature', in *Society and Literature 1945-1970* ed. by Alan Sinfield (London: Methuen, 1983), p. 127.
- 27 Anne Walmsley's interview transcript with Diana Athill, 9.7.87, p.1. I am indebted to Dr Walmsley for allowing me access to her interview transcripts. Walmsley's interviews were necessarily directed towards assessing CAM's influence. I am extrapolating from her interviews the ways in which gender might influence production and development, even though Walmsley was clearly not concerned with exploring this at the time.
- 28 Walmsley, p. 36.
- 29 Patricia Waugh, *Harvest of the Sixties: English Literature and its Background 1960 to 1990* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 39-41.
- 30 Walmsley, p. xviii.
- 31 Walmsley, back cover.
- 32 Walmsley, p. 291.
- 33 Author's interview with Dr Anne Walmsley and Professor Louis James, 31.5.95. See Appendix 3.3, p. 279.
- 34 Walmsley's interview transcript with Yvonne Sobers, 16.3.86.
- 35 Walmsley's interview transcript with Christine Craig, 12.3.86.
- 36 Walmsley's interview with Craig.
- 37 Walmsley's interview with Craig. Jessica Huntley's obituary for Salkey suggested how his own work suffered as a result of this nurturing role: 'Encouraging younger writers, he was wont to read the work of others rather than his own.' Jessica Huntley, 'Poems and Stories of the Caribbean: Andrew Salkey' in *Guardian*, 1 May 1995, p. 14
- 38 The first Caribbean Festival Arts (Carifesta) took place in Guyana in 1972. By 1972, many of the CAM members had returned to the Caribbean and Walmsley relates the importance of CAM to the festivals. The Guyanese Carifesta was the first 'fully regional celebration of all the Caribbean Arts, to which CAM people and ideas had contributed, which CAM people attended and at which Brathwaite held another CAM session.' *The Caribbean Artists Movement*, p. 259. Craig refers to a later Carifesta held in Barbados.

- ³⁹ Walmsley, p. 307.
- ⁴⁰ Following the return of Edward Brathwaite to Jamaica in 1968, CAM did have a woman secretary for a short period: Marina Maxwell.
- ⁴¹ Walmsley, p. 307.
- ⁴² Walmsley, p. 223.
- ⁴³ Walmsley, p. 36.
- ⁴⁴ Walmsley was qualified to describe the labour involved in typing on a manual typewriter having been a secretary at Faber & Faber in the early part of her career in publishing.
- ⁴⁵ Walmsley, p. 282. Laurence Breiner, in his essay 'The eighties', also pays tribute to Doris Brathwaite. Significantly, he places her influence within the tradition of a list of distinguished pioneers: '... the inimitable Doris Brathwaite, wife and muse to Kamau, but in her own right the guiding spirit of The Caribbean Artists Movement and a mainstay of the entire enterprise of West Indian Literature. Her passing was made more poignant because it coincided with the passing of the formidable ancestors who had played the same sustaining role for earlier generations: Frank Collymore, Arthur Seymour, Edna Manley, C.L.R. James - all of them artists of talent whose encouragement, patronage, and organisational skills made possible much of the flowering since the Second World War', in *West Indian Literature*, ed. by Bruce King, rev. edn (London: Macmillan, 1995; first published in 1979), pp. 76-89 (p. 87).
- ⁴⁶ Author's interview with Ferland, transcript p. 371.
- ⁴⁷ Doris Harper Wills came to London on a scholarship to study dance and drama at the Rose Bruford School. She had previously lived in New York and associated with members of The Harlem Writers Guild.
- ⁴⁸ Walmsley's interview transcript with Doris Harper Wills, 19.3.86.
- ⁴⁹ Author's discussion with Walmsley, London, 14.8.95.
- ⁵⁰ Walmsley's interview transcript with Doris Harper Wills.
- ⁵¹ Walmsley, p. 282.
- ⁵² Bridget Jones was a lecturer at the University of West Indies during a period when the Brathwaites returned to Jamaica. She writes of the *Savacou* phase: 'very positive in cultural terms. This is why I measure Brathwaite's achievement in intangibles - very many black students, especially women - were given a stronger sense of self-worth'. Letter to Anne Walmsley from Bridget Jones cited in *The Caribbean Artists Movement 1966-1972: A Literary and Cultural History* (London: New Beacon Books, 1992), p. 282.

- ⁵³ During our discussion of the 14.8.95, Dr Walmsley remembered Berry's concern for women's inclusion and retrieved this item from her minutes file. She did not recall if the proposed event took place: 'Proposed Topic for future CAM meeting: A review with Louise Bennett, Merle Hodge, Paule Marshall and Marina Maxwell.' (Item 14. Note from meeting of CAM 27 June, 1971).
- ⁵⁴ Walmsley (p. 261) lists extracts from new novels or novels in progress by John Hearn, George Lamming, Timothy Callender, James Carnegie, and poetry by Martin Carter, John Figueroa, Cecil Gray, Nicolas Guillen, A.L. Hendriks, Derek Walcott, James Berry, Wayne Brown, Dennis Craig, Marc Matthews, Anthony McNeill, Mervyn Morris, Victor Questel, Basil Smith, Bruce St John, Dennis Scott.
- ⁵⁵ For examples of women contributors to *Savacou* and other Caribbean literary journals in the 1940s, '50s, '60s and '70s, see Barbara Commissiong and Marjorie Thorpe, eds., 'A Selected Bibliography of Women Writers in the Eastern Caribbean', in *World Literature Written in English*, 17.1 (1978), 279-304.
- ⁵⁶ Walmsley, pp. 281-282.
- ⁵⁷ CAM's concerns were more recently articulated in Robin Blackburn, 'Blacks in ivory towers can't write about ghettos', in *The Observer Review*, 2 March, 1997, p.16. Blackburn reviews: William Banks, *Black Intellectuals: Race and Responsibility in American Life* (London: W.W. Norton, 1997): 'In *Black Intellectuals*, William Banks distinguishes between the responsibility African-American writers have to their own people and their more universal calling as novelists, critics or historians.'
- ⁵⁸ Hugh Boatswain, 'Old Father', in *Writing*, by Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers (London: Centreprise, 1978), p. 45.
- ⁵⁹ Author's interview with Donald Hinds, London, 30.8.95. p. 14.
- ⁶⁰ Selvon, p. 75.
- ⁶¹ Waugh's literary history does not describe any of the Federation's birth pangs. Neither does she include any mention of CAM in her chapter on 'Nation and New Identities', both organisations remaining, in Walmsley's terms, 'curiously absent' from her assessment of important literary developments of this period.
- ⁶² Waugh, p. 13.
- ⁶³ In 1971, Chris Searle was dismissed from his teaching job as a result of a dispute concerning his publication of school-children's writing. Searle had not gained official permission to publish *Stepney Words* (London: Centreprise, 1973; First published in two editions by Reality Press in 1971). The back cover validates the project: '15,000 copies of these poems have

been printed and sold, giving these young working-class children a readership far larger than many established poets.'

- ⁶⁴ John Rae, cited in Dave Morley and Ken Worpole, *The Republic of Letters: Working Class Writing and Local Publishing* (London, Comedia, 1982; Rae's letter was first published in the *Observer*, 7 February, 1982), p. v.
- ⁶⁵ A.H. Charnley and H.A. Jones, *The Concept of Success in Adult Literacy*, 3rd. edn (London: Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit, 1986; first published, Huntinton, 1979), p. 2.
- ⁶⁶ The first issue of *Voices: Verse and Prose published by the Manchester Unity of Arts* (1972) predates the Federation. Contributors are careful to state their allegiances, suggesting that a sympathy with Marxism was more important than their actual working-class status. The group leader states that the publication is the work of 'men and women taking up a pen late in life; with some qualms, though with real curiosity as to how it will turn out.' The actual membership of the group stems from an English class which met at the New Cross Ward Labour Club to discuss 'Literature on the basis of a Marxist analysis'.
- ⁶⁷ See Jim McGuigan, 'The State and Serious Writing: Arts Council Intervention in the English Literary Field', unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Leicester, 1984.
- ⁶⁸ McGuigan, p. 242.
- ⁶⁹ Rebecca O'Rourke was a founder member of Centreprise and published short stories with Virago and a detective novel, *Jumping The Cracks* (London: Virago, 1987). Jimmy McGovern is perhaps one of the most commercially successful writers to have their beginnings in the Federation. McGovern was a member of one of the Federation's founding groups, Liverpool's Scotland Road. He contributed prose pieces to the first anthology, *Writing*, and to the 1979 and 1983 editions of *Voices*. McGovern writes for television, including *Brookside*, *Go Now*, *Priest*, and *Hillsborough*. He is probably best known for his award winning writing for the Granada Television series, *Cracker*.
- ⁷⁰ During a discussion with Roger Mills, he explained how he has attempted to address this restriction by setting up a separate group for novelists, which he convenes in Tower Hamlets. Discussion with Roger Mills, Loughborough, 5.4.97.
- ⁷¹ Author's interview with Ken Worpole, 28.11.95, transcript p.2.
- ⁷² Interview with Worpole, transcript p. 8.
- ⁷³ Caroline Williams, 'Angela', in *Voices*, Spring, 1982, p.41.
- ⁷⁴ Williams, p.41.
- ⁷⁵ Walmsley's interview transcript with Stuart Hall, London, 8.10.87.

- ⁷⁶ See the autobiography of Buchi Emecheta who came to London in 1962, *Head Above Water* (London: Fontana, 1984), p. 62. She recalled her determination to write: 'Who will be interested in reading the life of an unfortunate black woman who seemed to be making a mess of her life? I asked myself many, many times. Then the answer came to me after reading Nell Dunn's *Poor Cow*, and books like *A Pair of Hands* and *A Pair of Feet* by Monica Dickens, books based on "social reality". [...] I myself found such documentary novels not only interesting but very informative, too. So for the second time in my life I started putting my thoughts onto paper. Again I went to our local Woolworths and bought three exercise books and two Bic pens and wrote on Saturday and Sunday mornings before starting the day's work.'
- ⁷⁷ Author's interview with Rebecca O'Rourke, 17.6.95, transcript p. 10.
- ⁷⁸ Author's interview with Donald Hinds, London, 30.8.95, transcript p. 6.
- ⁷⁹ Diana Athill, 'Jean Rhys and the writing of *Wide Sargasso Sea*', *The Bookseller*, August 20, 1966, p. 1379.
- ⁸⁰ See David Plante, 'Jean' in *Difficult Women: a memoir of three women: Rhys, Orwell, Greer* (London: Gollancz, 1983) pp. 7-63. The memoir of Rhys was first published in a different form in the *Paris Review* in 1979.
- ⁸¹ Author's discussion with Merle Hodge, Miami, Florida, 27.4.96.
- ⁸² Letter to the author from Diana Athill, 24.7.95. It is interesting that Athill mentions that Hodge was 'the only woman writer from the West Indies that came my way', given the importance of her relationship with Rhys. Hodge did not stop writing but went out of publication, in terms of creative writing, for some years.
- ⁸³ Author's interview with Dr Walmsley and Professor James, 31.5.95. See Appendix 3.3, p. 305.
- ⁸⁴ Author's discussion with Dr Beryl Gilroy, Miami, Florida, 26.4.96.
- ⁸⁵ Judy Simons interviews Carmen Cahill, 'Women, publishing and power', in *Writing: A Woman's Business: Women, Writing and the Marketplace*, ed. by Judy Simons and Kate Fullbrook (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), pp. 183-193 (p. 185). The chapter's contents largely replicate the paper given by Callil at the second conference of 'Literature: A Woman's Business' in Sheffield, 1995. In her paper, Callil suggested that the reason why so many women found senior positions in publishing in the 1960s was that 'All the bright boys left to go in to television'.

PART 2 'CHANGING THE WORLD VERSUS WRITING STORIES '

CHAPTER 3

'CHANGING THE WORLD VERSUS WRITING STORIES '

3.1 Issues of Form in West Indian Women's Writing

VELMA POLLARD: But there are really not many female models. I mean people like Una Marson and so, for some reason they are not the generation just before us; they are older. There are women poets and story-tellers. If you think of, say even Louise Bennett, she is not really the generation just before me; she is not five years older than I. I think that what happens is that, well, Mervyn [Morris] is exactly my age except for a month; Eddie [Brathwaite] is seven years older. So I think it is that they are accessible, because they are so close to our own time. I think we have missed out a whole set of women poets, whether they didn't write or they didn't publish... ¹

Velma Pollard speaks of the mysterious loss of a post-war generation of West Indian women poets; and explanations as to 'whether they didn't write or didn't publish' often conclude that the majority of West Indian women were, at this time, silenced by their gendered, ethnic and class-based consciousness. There is a strong argument that their societal place prevented them seeing themselves as writers of 'literature' and consequently, the argument goes, the majority of women did not perceive themselves as writers in *any* form. In the 1940s, '50s and '60s, this may have been true for many women from different classes, particularly with respect to their difficulty in imagining themselves as potential full-time novelists and poets. But there are genuine reasons, other than self-perception,

why West Indian women found it difficult to write and publish novels and poetry and some of these will emerge in the following chapters.

However, women's absence from literary histories is also connected to issues surrounding choices of form. It could be argued that the field of West Indian literature was created in 1970, when Kenneth Ramchand published his ground-breaking work of scholarship, *The West Indian Novel and its Background*. Ramchand's work surveyed the historical and aesthetic development of the West Indian novel and, in doing so, he continued to valorise an exclusive cultural form that would be inappropriate for the majority of West Indian women. But even those women who had published novels were largely written out of Ramchand's 1970 year-by-year Appendix (which was still being quoted as authoritative recently by the *Guardian's* Maya Jaggi); this contained just five entries for women novelists out of his account of 169 published novels between 1903 and 1967 (Ramchand's list is reproduced in Appendix 4).² The list that I compiled of West Indian women writers in Appendix 5 reveals a tentative figure of a modest (though much improved) figure of thirty-two published novels from 1948 to 1979, and the two respective Appendices are bound to have 'missed' writers that may yet be recovered. Even so, it is this paucity of novels by West Indian women that maintains their exclusion from literary histories such as Ramchand's and which continues to be promoted in later surveys. As an example, in an essay which inevitably takes 'literature' to mean the novel and poetry, Edward Baugh's historical survey of the 1960s and '70s, in the 1995 edition of Bruce King's *West Indian Literature*, opens with: 'The 1960s and 1970s witnessed the consolidation and expansion of the achievements of the novelists who had, by the remarkable efflorescence of the 1950s, established the international presence of West Indian literature as a distinct corpus.'³ Although Baugh mentions poetry (by Derek Walcott and Edward Brathwaite) and the drama (of Walcott and Trevor Rhone), the novel is advanced as the supreme development in West Indian cultural expression. However, the present thesis has

widened the search for Velma Pollard's 'missed' generation of women poets (and novelists) to take account of different forms of expression which were not necessarily dominated by West Indian males in the 1960s and '70s. The following chapters provide some clues as to the extent to which West Indian women were creative during this period, using a variety of published scribal forms.

As Toni Morrison has argued with respect to the bourgeois novel, West Indian working-class women would have no use for such an estranged form: 'The lower classes didn't need novels at that time because they had an art form already: they had songs and dances, and ceremony and gossip and celebrations.'⁴ What is of interest to this work is the notion that the majority of West Indian women (with the exception of students, artists and performers) who migrated to Britain in the post-war period found themselves removed from those vernacular forms of expression which Morrison cites. Their arrival in Britain was said to have produced a 'culture shock' in which such songs, dances, stories and ceremonies would appear to have no immediate place in the new society. It is interesting to consider, therefore, the effect of a 'culture shock' that severed women from those oral forms which were insistent upon the knowledge of shared histories of their local community back home. Whilst the novel would undoubtedly present an inhospitable form to many West Indian women from a non-literary society, I would argue that it is this loss of contact with the community and their shared orality which stimulates a need to find hitherto unused scribal forms. Indeed, as cited in chapter 2, Kristeva would maintain that it is a loss of meaning, associated with separation from the familiar, which serves as the prerequisite for creative expression. Poverty and isolation are as likely to produce the impulse to write as to deny the possibility of it. We know that there are testimonies to the fact that many of the so-called 'ordinary' women from the West Indies found their energies completely absorbed by their daily struggles to settle into a hostile country. Exhausted by their efforts in the early years of settlement, it is only now that many of them are finding the time and the voice to

record their memories.⁵ Additionally, women speak of their investment in the next generation, and of finding their personal fulfilment through activities associated with their family and their church. It is true that many women will never consider writing as a legitimate form of expression.

However, against these odds, the working-class West Indian women who joined Federation groups clearly felt the need to write. Tim Diggles is the national administrator for the Federation, and has considerable experience of community arts. He believes that, at grass-roots level, writing is the most prevalent form of creative expression: 'the writing groups we know about don't even touch the surface.' In our discussion, he maintained that trauma such as 'birth, death, separation actually stimulates writing'.⁶ In support of Diggles's argument, it would appear that poverty, local hostility and an oral culture did not manage to obliterate the desire to write in the well-documented case of Carolina Maria de Jesus. The aforementioned (in Chapter 2) 1977 women's issue of *Savacou* carried the following tribute to her extraordinary drive to record her life experience:

Carolina Maria de Jesus, Afro-Brazilian child of slaves, raised three children in the favelas of Brazil. Somewhere in the midst of walking 10 - 15 miles a day looking for old rags and newspapers for sale, she found the time to write a diary.⁷

Writers from marginalised groups, such as Carolina's, are sometimes completely absent from the literary agenda, or they are equally likely, in the late twentieth century, to be fetishized as tokens of 'otherness' for those readers who are outside the experience of the group. However, the history of marginalised expression, particularly working-class writing, refutes the suggestion that a race, class or gender are inherently less likely to have the impulse to write than other groups. The case of Carolina Maria de Jesus, who wrote and published her diaries out of some of the most difficult circumstances imaginable, is exemplary in this respect

(see Chapter 6. section 3). Nevertheless, writing by West Indian women within the corpus of British literature is extremely rare prior to the 1980s, and the present research attempts to explore possible explanations for this.

It would be tempting to assume that constraints attached to the various labels of 'black', 'white-skinned West Indian', 'foreigner', and/or 'working-class' woman, would ensure that writing (particularly novels) from these perspectives would be unlikely to enter the public domain. However, the thesis presents work by West Indian women, both from educated and poorly educated classes, who published in various modes of prose and poetry, some of which is listed in Appendix 5. In the main, their writing would be lost because it would not be recognised by the characteristic standards defined by British post-war literary critics. For example, West Indian women were typically extensive writers for children and some of the reasons for this (many of them shared by women writers from previous centuries) were suggested in the previous chapter. Their categorisation as 'children's authors' would militate against their efforts to be recognised as 'serious' writers. Chapters 4 and 6 also offer examples of women's novels and autobiographies which confounded conventional literary categorisation which then resulted in a reluctance to find appropriate ways of reading the material. As a result of its difference (and disruption of the male cultural hegemony), the work of pioneering women writers will disappear without the type of research that seeks to understand it historically.

The prime focus of recuperative research is the attempt to find concrete examples of writing that is held to be non-existent, and bring it in to view for formal analysis and critical discussion. The samples of writing in Part 2 have been selected with this in mind and to refute, or support, some of the explanations that were presented for its absence in Chapter 1. There is no attempt to homogenise the various forms and voices in the recovered writing; its diversity is inextricable from the argument to account for its loss. That is, if all the women writers in Appendix 5 had published novels, their visibility in literary histories

such as Ramchand's, would have been much greater. As it stands, different forms of writing, coupled with geographical and cultural fragmentation preclude any claim to its being representative of a particular genre, region or society. For example, Sylvia Wynter's novel *The Hills of Hebron* bears little relation to the community publication, *Captain Blackbeard's Beef Creole*, but the selection is intended to give some indication of the range of expression and the historical development of West Indian women's writing and publishing throughout the 1960s and '70s. The inclusion of non-literary forms of writing and activity, such as journalism, publishing and politics, is an obvious but important means of suggesting why women writers are hidden from literary history. Working-class beginner writers are not usually the focus of literary histories; they produce work either in a void, without any preconceived notions of literary quality and technique or, conversely, they may be bound by notions of literary formulae which suggest to them that they should be writing like Wordsworth or Walcott. Nevertheless, by not privileging form and style above content, and by diversifying the examples of women producing writing, this thesis may register otherwise hidden changes within the history of West Indian and black British quests for identity.

To attempt to understand West Indian women's writing historically is to try to relate choices of form and content to the historical transitions which the women writers were part of. The writing selected below is generated, both in Britain and in the West Indies, out of a colonial tradition which collides dramatically with a challenge to that tradition as played out in the power-struggles of the late 1950s and early 1960s. Their struggles to find appropriate voices and forms takes place during decades which witnessed some dramatic shifts in consciousness both in Britain and in the newly independent regions of the Caribbean. The 1960s in Britain is characterised as one of settlement for the majority of West Indians; by the end of the period of this study, 1979, the climate had changed considerably, and a second generation of children, born in Britain of Caribbean parentage,

challenged their parents' reverence for British culture. The notion of a type of assimilation which would be achieved by eradicating cultural difference would largely disappear with a black British generation. The younger generation, some of whom had never visited the Caribbean, reclaimed a Patois voice as the symbol of cultural resistance that, ironically, their parents had endeavoured to lose in order to 'fit in'. The generational conflict, as played out in language, is expressed by the following young black Briton in Viv Edward's linguistic study, *Language in a Black Community*:

'Dem a stop me and say, "We bring you over here fi h'educate you, a learn fi speak better", and all this kind of thing. Well, me used to listen to dem, but after dem gone, me used to speak the same.'⁸

The increasingly violent events of the '70s would mock the older generation's patient attempts to acquire respectability in the eyes of the white British. In 1978, Hugh Boatswain's image of the 'Old Father', colonised and now irreversibly 'sold out', stands as the figure of contempt for this Centreprise's young black writer:

Time passed.
Old father feet begin to shift.
His roots have no meaning now.
He straighten his hair,
Press it smooth.
Coloured girls no good for he -
Day after day you see him
Bouncing down the road with a blonde,
Never a brunette,
And his suit cream or beige,
Never anything dark.

Old Father don't mix with the boys
On Saturday night no more -
No. He sit in the pub up the road -
The one at the corner
That don't like serving black people -
And he crack joke with them white people on we.
'Tut tut,' he would say,

'Isn't it disgusting
How they make a spectacle of themselves
At cricket matches.' [...]

Boy,
Old Father don't want to know we now,
In his white Rover,
With his slicked-back hair.
And them white people saying
'He's an example to his people!'⁹

It is generally held that by 1979, women writers were part of a very different cultural scene which connected language and form overtly to resistance (to racism), as represented in the work of activists associated with *Race Today*. This profound shift in consciousness is captured in David Ellis's description of Linton Kwesi Johnson's 'Creation for Liberation' movement as: ' [...] a symbol of independent black expression in Britain, composed, published and sold in Britain without reference to the white majority or its cultural hegemony.'¹⁰ However, it would be misleading to convey the impression that West Indian women writers of the 1950s, '60s and early '70s were an acquiescent group. On the contrary, they worked in various ways to create a collective resistance to social inequalities and the following section presents women's involvement in forms of cultural activism which have not often been explored.

3.2 Responses: Journalism and Publishing as Cultural Activism

Pearl Connor-Mogotsi's opening address to the 1995 Bookfair of Radical Black and Third World Books attended to the absence of women in the history of black achievements. She said: 'If we are going to record our own history we must rediscover our invisible women.'¹¹ West Indian women's contributions to cultural activism are presented here to suggest how their invisible achievements in this arena may have worked against their writing careers and prevented them from

pursuing other forms of personal expression. These are the West Indian women who might have become celebrated writers had they chosen another path. Connor-Mogotsi is an example who, when she met the chilly environment of the 1950s, organised a practical means of countering racial discrimination. She was herself a gifted actress who came to Britain from Trinidad in the 1950s to study law, and she circulated amongst black artists, writers and performers who were finding many doors barred to them. In London, she met and married singer, actor and film-maker, Edric Connor and together they started the Edric Connor Agency which became the first of its kind for African-Asian-Caribbean artists.¹² The Connor's client list included: Carmen Munroe, Ram John Holder, Eddie Grant, Joan Armatrading, Patti Boulaye, Lloyd Reckord and many others who went on to become established within the worlds of theatre, television and music. The agency also co-produced ground-breaking black British films such as *Carnival Fantastique* (1959) and the cricket series *West Indies vs England* (1963). In 1963, Connor-Mogotsi established the Negro Theatre Workshop, a company of thirty black actors, and continued to plan tours for singers, dancers, actors and musicians with her second husband, Joseph Mogotsi, until 1976. Connor-Mogotsi has been honoured for her achievements in Trinidad and in Britain for promoting the rights of minority groups in Britain. Given the platform at Selvon's tribute, she chose also to remember how divided the artists and performers were from 'ordinary' West Indians:

Those of us who were in a privileged position in the arts and at university were in a class of our own. We hardly batted an eyelid at what was going on around us. Selvon showed us the lives of poor Afro-Caribbean and Asian immigrants.¹³

Connor-Mogotsi foregrounded Selvon's ability to write across the barriers that sometimes divided West Indians in terms of their class, religion, and caste. Although homogenised by the host culture as 'Jamaican immigrants', West Indians from very different regions found themselves working under considerable

stress, side by side with competitive groups of so-called 'little-islanders'. Selvon's writing exposed a privileged group of students, professionals, writers and artists to the often desperate circumstances of these poorer migrants. Whilst Selvon was able to write across the barrier which separated the circumstances of rich and poor, few people would have had the necessary experience and personal skills to bridge those differences and to encourage the people involved to organise collectively against their oppression. However, Claudia Jones was a West Indian woman who was exceptionally successful at unifying disparate groups of 'ordinary' West Indians, artists, intellectuals and black activists in the fight against race and class oppression. An account of her life and her work explains how her own creativity and writing undoubtedly suffered as a result of her dedication to that cause.

The case of Claudia Jones, journalist, poet, autobiographer, and the writer who sacrificed her personal development (and her health and liberty) to the cause of political activism, is little-known or discussed outside of a group of devotees. Much of what follows on her British contribution is taken from my record of a one-day symposium on her life and achievements held in London in 1996. The symposium brought together close friends and colleagues and used their collective memories to piece together the significant events of her life and death in London. In the course of her working day in London in the early 1960s, Jones might equally write for the *West Indian Gazette*, and intervene in the case of a homeless immigrant, advise a visiting political figure of the standing of Norman Manley or Martin Luther King. It is not surprising that her gifts were held, by those who knew her, to be extraordinary. At a time of intense activity - anti-racist movements in the US, independence struggles in the colonies and the

conflicts that resulted from migration to Britain - a remarkable West Indian woman sought asylum in London.

The circumstances which would result in her asylum-seeking began with her life as an immigrant in America. Claudia Jones was born in Port of Spain, Trinidad, in 1915; at the age of nine, she emigrated to New York and settled with her family in Harlem. The family lived at the epicentre of the many anti-racist movements, including the Marcus Garvey-led 'Universal Negro Improvement Association' which suffered brutal attacks. It was in this impoverished but resilient community that Jones became politicised. In her teens, she joined the Young Communist League and resolved to work for social, political and economic equality. A gifted child, she had been forced to leave school during the Depression and felt the disadvantage of her truncated education. She embarked on a vigorous programme of self-improvement and studied hard, including drama and political classes. Claudia was torn between acting and journalism (both talents would prove useful in her later life) but turned down a place to study drama, choosing instead to take up a post as a technical worker with the *Daily Worker*, the US newspaper of the Communist Party. This, and other work on black newspapers, was to give her the hands-on experience to launch the *West Indian Gazette* when she came to London. Newsprint communication was a vital means of organising resistance in the American Civil Rights Movement and Jones's editorials challenged people to act. By 1940, in America, she was writing regular articles for the Young Communist League. Given the intensity of her political commitment at a time when anti-Communist feeling was running very high, it was inevitable that her activities should bring her to the attention of the American authorities. Her activities were regarded, along with those of other notable black figures such as C.L.R. James and the actor Paul Robeson, as subversive. 1948 was the first occasion on which Claudia Jones was arrested on a deportation warrant. Between then and 1955, there followed a series of arrests, bails, and imprisonment under the 1940 Smith Act. She was treated as an

undesirable alien under the advocacy section of the Alien Registration Act. In her statements to the court, she refused to compromise her beliefs:

It was out of my Jim Crow experiences as a young Negro woman, experiences likewise born out of working-class poverty that led me to join the young Communist League and to choose the philosophy of my life, the science of Marxism-Leninism - that philosophy that not only rejects racist ideas but is the antithesis of them.¹⁴

As an undesirable alien, Jones was to be deported from America, but Trinidad was reluctant to allow her to return to her birth-place. Additionally, by 1955, the stress of poverty, court battles and imprisonment had caused her heart condition to deteriorate and she urgently needed the type of medical attention that was available in Britain; her request for asylum was granted by British Embassy officials who visited her in prison in 1955 and made the necessary arrangements.

Jones should be remembered for her many significant achievements in the area of consciousness-raising, including her instigation of an award for black achievers in Britain (which Pearl Connor-Mogotsi subsequently won). As a committed Communist, possibly one of Jones's greatest achievements was that she was able, through an apparently potent mixture of tenacity and charisma, to unite very different groups of people in spite of conflicting interests. Ranjana Ash described her leadership qualities as follows:

She crossed so many boundaries - and she was responsible for the Committee for Afro-Asian Organisations which met at 3 Collingham Gardens, Earls Court. She was a dynamic laughing woman who united people who could be divided over three worlds. There were many struggles against imperialism at this time and Claudia united people who could so easily be divided over Cuba, Vietnam, Aden, Ghana.¹⁵

In London, writers, performers, artists, activists and workers met at political rallies organised by her and through events connected with her (sometimes single-handed) efforts to write and publish the *West Indian Gazette*, Jones

encouraged different races and factions to attend the march to the US Embassy in Grosvenor Square that she organised in support of Martin Luther King. Jones knew King, and when he passed through London in 1964 on the way to Oslo to collect his Nobel peace prize, he met her and Amy Garvey, the widow of Marcus Garvey, at Pearl Connor's London flat. British West Indian, African and Asian migrants were to benefit from the combined political experience and publishing expertise of both women. Unlike African-Americans, West Indians had no experience of the type of racial attacks that they would encounter on the streets of the British cities of London and Nottingham. As subjects of racial violence in Britain, they were, understandably, shocked and frightened but had little or no experience of organising a collective response, since in the West Indies, news was censored and people were prevented from reading about American civil rights struggles. They needed someone with black American experience, and Jones proved to be a much respected and vital leader in several ways which can only be briefly sketched here: she attended many events, both political and cultural, and carried the news of such matters to very different groups; she kept a divided and frightened migrant community fully informed of national and international civil rights matters through the *West Indian Gazette*; she used her direct experience of the American civil rights protests to organise people in such a way that prevented their exodus from Britain in the panic that followed the violence in Notting Hill and Nottingham; and she was able through her standing within the community, and her presence of mind, to calm down a volatile situation following the murder of Kelso Cochrane. Jones's knowledge of, and ability to communicate through, the print medium of the *West Indian Gazette* was highly instrumental in calming fears, instilling confidence and conveying a sense of resistance to a black migrant community under threat. The paper was one of Jones's greatest achievements, written and issued against considerable odds.

The first issue of the *West Indian Gazette*, edited by Claudia Jones and Amy Garvey, was published in London in March 1958. It was written, printed and

circulated from the upstairs room of Theo Campbell's 'Blue Beat Imports' record shop. Campbell was an RAF veteran who provided free space above his Lambeth premises and contributed to the *Gazette* as sports editor. No one received any payment for their work associated with the paper; services were voluntary and necessarily intermittent. Issues did not appear, not because the paper was not written, but because it had proved impossible to raise the £100 printing costs. The *West Indian Gazette* reflected the broad sweep of Jones's interests. As well as political news, she saw it as equally important to keep the community informed of cultural developments, and it carried reviews of new creative writing and theatre performances. Such broad interests ensured that she was able to communicate with a range of people, and when important West Indian figures visited Britain they often sought her astute political and cultural analysis. Following the Notting Hill riots, the Jamaican Prime Minister, Norman Manley, visited the offices of the *Gazette* to discuss the worsening situation. Donald Hinds, who assisted with the *Gazette*, remembers this ability as her strength: 'This was her gift. She could be talking to Manley one minute and caring for some ordinary person who had been evicted from down the road the next.'¹⁶

Following the Notting Hill and Nottingham riots, it was during a further meeting which took place at the *Gazette* office to discuss what might be done to calm fears when someone jokingly suggested a carnival. Jones envisaged how the organisation of a carnival would unite frightened groups in an event that would simultaneously make a public statement to the British that West Indian migrants were, as David Roussel-Milner put it, 'cultured and prepared to share that culture'.¹⁷ The first West Indian carnival, which took place inside St Pancras Town Hall, in January 1959, was indeed organised by Jones and her many contacts. Subsequent carnivals were to attract talent of the ilk of The Mighty Sparrow, imported especially from Trinidad to promote West Indian cultural forms in a way that established their presence as confident, distinctive and engaging.¹⁸ The origin of the British West Indian carnival, now one of the biggest

events of its kind in Europe, is sometimes incorrectly attributed to other organisers, but Jones's achievements in this area are corroborated by many of the first participants.¹⁹

Periods of imprisonment, and poverty together with the effort associated with political organisation and production of the *Gazette*, contributed to Jones's deteriorating heart condition. She died at the age of forty-nine on Christmas day 1964, and it is said that the *West Indian Gazette* died with her. Through her writing, she had demonstrated her ability in a range of published articles, editorials and political ephemera. However, there was also a literary side to Claudia which surfaced in the occasional poem for the *Gazette*. Buzz Johnson's biography relates how, whilst in prison in America, she wrote poetry which she memorised and transcribed on release.²⁰ This extract from a poem dedicated to her fellow political prisoner, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, suggests that it may have been written in prison or shortly after release:

I'll see you oft at twilight's dusk
Before the sun will fade
I'll conjure up your twinkling laugh
Your eyes so much like Jade

I'll see you in the dark of night
When Nature seeks her rest
Except the reedy crickets
Who muse in watch, I guess

I'll think of you forever
And how your spirit rings
Because your faith leaps as a flame
Sweet nurture to all things²¹

Jones's dedication to activism and journalism has inevitably resulted in her absence from literary accounts of Caribbean women. However, this situation may change with the release of her papers which include fifteen poems. As Carole Boyce Davies is correct to assert, future attention to her work may ensure that

'We can therefore add to the aforementioned descriptors [political activist, black nationalist, feminist, communist, anti-imperialist, journalist, community organiser] the following: Caribbean Woman Writer.'²² In addition to her poems, a number of her close associates testify to the fact that she was writing an autobiography and Pansy Jeffreys remembers that 'She was about to finish her writing when she died'.²³ Donald Hinds, close friend and co-worker, described her reading him extracts of the autobiography in the office of the *Gazette*. However, after her death the work disappeared; it was thought to have been critical of certain features of the British Communist Party. Nevertheless, it was the Party who organised her funeral and presented Jones as one of their most important political figure-heads. In death, she was mourned as a leader with something of the stature of Martin Luther King. There was a large public funeral procession which led an observer to remark that 'We have lost the only person who had qualified as the national leader of the Afro-Asian Caribbean peoples in Britain'²⁴. A copy of the missing autobiography may yet surface, and as a unique record of one of the most influential Caribbean women in London in the 1960s, it would certainly provide a rare contribution to our knowledge of the organisation of resistance in this period. Publication would also reveal the private world of Claudia Jones and might establish her as a Caribbean woman autobiographer of similar significance to Mary Prince and Mary Seacole. The following fragment, from an article for the *Daily Worker*, describes Jones's experience as a political prisoner in 1955 on a journey between the Women's House of Detention in New York to the Federal Reformatory for Women in West Virginia; it suggests something of the flavour and the potential importance of Jones's autobiographical writing, should it ever be recovered:

We were on our way to continue our unjust sentences under the Smith Act, two weeks of which was already served at the Women's House of Detention in New York.

We travelled on the New York central, sleeping in double decker Pullman beds. A pyjama-clad male marshall slept adjacent to Elizabeth Gurley Flynn on the lower level while Betty Gannett and I huddled in one bed on the upper compartment adjacent to which lay a woman marshall. But this was only an index of the indignities to which one is subject to in prison life.²⁵

It is important for my argument that Claudia Jones's fragile health was worsened by the fact that she often went hungry in the course of her work, relying on friends to provide the occasional sustenance. Journalism was *the* politicised form of expression for her, but it provided her with no income or means of support. Indeed, with her talents she might have expected to earn a comfortable income instead of the near-starvation that her political activities forced her to endure. In contrast, like Jan Shinebourne's fictional Sandra Yansen in *Timepiece*, other West Indian women made their livings as reporters, feature writers and as editors in this period, as did Sam Selvon as a journalist in Trinidad. Since creative artists could not expect to support themselves by their output, journalism provided a relatively compatible means of making a living. Gloria Escoffery, for example, was an aspiring painter who used her abilities as a writer to support her art. In the 1940s in Jamaica, she was a 'struggling artist earning a very modest living as "literary editor" for a weekly newspaper'²⁶ Escoffery came to London on a British Council scholarship in the early 1950s to attend the Slade School of Art (and this is how she came to contribute to the BBC's *Caribbean Voices*). When she returned to Kingston, she continued to support her painting partly as a columnist on the *Jamaica Journal* and the *Jamaica Gleaner* well into the early 1980s.

Journalism was not only a source of income for women writers but there were also instances when it clearly served to legitimise their writing ability at a time when women often suffered rejection of their creative work. As an example, in the 1960s, when Beryl Gilroy was finding it difficult to get her creative work

published, she wrote articles for various newspapers and periodicals and this provided her with the satisfaction that her writing was of a standard for publication.²⁷ While the critical response to Joyce Gladwell's 1969 autobiography, *Brown Face, Big Master*, was encouraging, and although the 21,000 paperback copies were sold out by 1974, she failed to find a publisher for her second autobiographical manuscript. Gladwell refused to give up writing however, and instead took a course in journalism and became a free-lance writer for a local newspaper.²⁸ But although some women writers found an important source of income as journalists and a certain validation of their abilities, ironically, it impacted negatively on the production of their own creative work. This was very much the case with Phyllis Shand Allfrey.

Allfrey became caught in the political unrest of the post-war period which affected groups of West Indians both at home and in Britain, and became politicised whilst working with the poor in London as a welfare advisor during the war. After the war, she worked with The West India Committee in the House of Commons. One of her duties was to meet West Indian immigrants disembarking in an unimaginably cold climate: 'We used to give them warm clothes.'²⁹ Her subsequent involvement in, and commitment to, socialist projects produced the type of ongoing struggle which women writers often express: 'It's always been my conflict to find time to write.'³⁰ In spite of an inability to turn away from everyday concerns, she did find time to write poems, one of which Vita Sackville West judged worthy of a second-prize in a competition.³¹ As stated in the previous chapter, *The Orchid House* was sold immediately to its first publisher, which should have encouraged Allfrey to write further novels. But when she died in 1986, she left a second novel, *In the Cabinet*, unfinished. She has become one of the better known examples of the creative, intellectual and socially committed women who engaged with the political upheavals of newly independent West Indian islands. She, like other women writers, found the energy required for political activity and journalism counter-productive to the

concentrated time and effort required for novel-writing. As Donald Herdeck maintains: 'During this period her literary work and output suffered'.³² As the first woman cabinet minister in the Federal Government of the West Indies, she was active in politics until the West Indian Federation was dissolved in 1962 and on her return to Dominica, she became a journalist and a nurturer of other talents:

When the Federation was dissolved in 1962, she returned to Dominica, to restart life under difficult and hostile circumstances. She became the \$1.00 a year Editor of a small opposition weekly paper - the *Dominican Herald*; then she was editor of the even smaller *Dominica Star*, owned and published by her husband. However the *Star* has outlived the *Herald* and one of its greatest contributions has been the cultivation and encouragement of young local writers.³³

It was this lifelong commitment to journalism and activism which was to produce the following highly significant reflection in later life:

Politics became more important than writing. I regret that now. I shouldn't have given up writing for politics. If I had stuck with it I would have accumulated more and got higher up that tree.³⁴

Appendix 5.3 documents all that could be traced of Allfrey's publications in the post-war period - although privately published poems and short stories are now beginning to circulate in Caribbean anthologies - and that corpus would undoubtedly have appeared different had she been able to concentrate more of her energies on her writing, particularly novels. In a sense, she represents the 'what might have been' generation of West Indian women writers who sacrificed their personal development to politics (and family, and work). Furthermore, had it not been for another group of women and their differently orientated politics, *The Orchid House* would have been 'lost' to literary history. In 1982, Virago reprinted Allfrey's only completed novel which had been out of print since 1954 (see Appendix 5.3). Its subsequent recognition, dramatisation for television, and ensuing critical attention, has located it in literary history alongside the novels of

Rhys. Consequently, Virago's recovery of *The Orchid House* should ensure that it remains in print and available. Nevertheless, Allfrey joins the 'syndrome' which Joanna Russ aptly describes in *How to Suppress Women's Writing* as: 'She wrote it, but she wrote only one of it.'³⁵

Without Virago many important texts would have remained out of print and out of the literary arena. In terms of publishing, owning the means of production may be the only way of releasing certain types of 'lost' or suppressed writing. For West Indians, printing newspapers and pamphlets had proved to be an important means of disseminating censored information (such as the banned speeches of Walter Rodney), but what was also needed was a sympathetic outlet which dealt specifically with African, black British and West Indian novels, anthologies, poetry and critical essays. Black people were (with some notable exceptions) excluded from mainstream arts and publishing - black women even more so - and in response they were to instigate a range of counter-attacks. It was in the area of publishing, then, that West Indian women also worked with friends and partners to provide a release for new creative writing and political expression. John La Rose recognised the urgency of acquiring some control of publishing; in a discussion with Andrew Salkey, he said: 'We've got to do something for the permanent record and publishing is one of the real ways of committing that act..... We've got to learn something of publishing.'³⁶ La Rose and Sarah White published their first title, a collection of La Rose's poems, under their newly formed 'New Beacon' imprint in 1966 which went on to publish a range of material from new writers, including a collection of critical essays by Wilson Harris in 1967. New Beacon supported The Caribbean Artists Movement by selling copies at meetings and performances and in this way provided an essential distribution of new titles and attracted new readers. The downstairs front room of La Rose and White's Finsbury Park home became the first New Beacon bookshop which acted as an unofficial bureau through which vital connections between writers and activists could be maintained. In 1969, Jessica and Eric

Huntley co-founded their press, Bogle-L'Ouverture, initially to print messages from Amy Garvey and to respond to the expulsion of Walter Rodney from Jamaica by publishing his banned speeches.³⁷ In 1974, they too opened a bookshop, this time in Ealing. For the Huntleys, publishing was political, and in 1982 they collaborated with New Beacon and *Race Today* to organise the first Book Fair of Radical Black and Third World Books which was opened by C.L.R. James.

Jessica Huntley has been an important part of the British West Indian cultural and political scene since her arrival from Guyana in 1957, and during our interview, she made the following observation on the position of West Indian women writers in the 1960s:

JH Many women were journalists and wrote for newspapers, essays, pamphlets. Doris Harper Wills wrote pamphlets and poetry, Claudia Jones was writing, Pearl Connor was writing. But I wonder why so many women wrote for newspapers but didn't appear to go on to write more sustained pieces as the men did.

SC Would ordinary women prefer to organise politically? What about the ones you came across?

JH Yes. The women were always there but they didn't see themselves as writers.³⁸

The preceding section might lead us to conclude that Claudia Jones was in fact writing 'a more sustained piece' in the form of her unpublished autobiography; and the case of Allfrey has provided some indication of the circumstances that prevented her from writing more sustained pieces in the form of novels. Chapter 2, has also considered the cases of Christine Craig and Yvonne Sobers who apparently 'didn't see themselves as writers' but published work years later. Jessica Huntley is herself part of that group of invisible achievers, and as an activist has consistently preferred to 'organise politically'. Women writers, some of whom are now well established put their own writing and development 'on

hold' whilst they engaged in politics, and the following section describes how women writers left Britain in the 1970s to take part in the political struggles of the newly independent Caribbean.

3.3 Women Writers and Political Activism in The Caribbean

It should be stressed that some of the brightest West Indian talents regarded their time in London as a transient experience. The upheavals created by moves towards emancipation, and revolution in Cuba and Grenada, prompted some of the writers who were educated in Europe to *return home to take their place* on the front line. As the case of Allfrey would suggest, in some instances they were to provide the leadership for that front line and a writer and artist like Gloria Escoffery had no intention of staying in Britain; for her, Jamaica, its people and its culture remained the prime focus (obviously this concern for the Caribbean in turmoil would apply to male contemporaries too). But there are some notable examples of West Indian women writers deploying their skills and knowledge directly in the aid of political causes which should be briefly mentioned here. Judith Laird had been a member of CAM in London but returned to Cuba to become one of Castro's private media team. Merle Hodge, Merle Collins and Pauline Melville were all active in the revolutionary New Jewel Movement of Grenada which, we now know, turned out to be 'on an inevitable collision course with the United States'.³⁹ Labouring for the revolution was a matter of 'working a twenty-hour day', and in our discussion, Hodge recalled that it simply 'left no time to write'.⁴⁰ Such a profound experience, however, would later inspire the poet Merle Collins to record the American invasion in October 1983 from the point of view of the horrified revolutionaries:

I watched
like easter-morning
through the egg-whites

of our shattered dreams
the ships that came
to scorn my tears
to mock our dreams
to launch the planes
that dropped the bombs
that ripped the walls
that raped the land
that burnt the earth
that crushed the dreams
that we all built ⁴¹

Hodge recalled that writing during the revolutionary period produced a sense in her that personal expression was self-indulgent, although writing for children was the exception and recognised as a political act. Balancing the desire to write against the need for political activism is articulated in her essay 'Challenges of the Struggle for Sovereignty: Changing the World versus Writing Stories', and the title of Part 2 of the present thesis, which is taken from Hodge, recognises the conflict between writing and activism which was especially acute in the 1960s and '70s. Hodge has, like many Caribbean writers, juggled her writing against the demands of continued activism, since the battles were far from won with the coming of independence: a Caribbean identity had to be forged against the imposition of neo-colonialism in the shape of a different type of American invasion. Hodge analysed newly independent Trinidad in this way:

The colonial era came to an end and we moved into independence. Theoretically, we could now begin to build up a sense of our cultural identity. But we immediately found ourselves in a new and more vicious era of cultural penetration. Television, which is basically American television, came to Trinidad and Tobago in 1962, the year the British flag was pulled down. The same pattern can be seen all over the Caribbean - withdrawing the most obvious trappings of colonial domination and installing a Trojan horse instead. ⁴²

It was against this 'Trojan horse' of Americanisation, and other complex historical and political currents, that writers were attempting to find distinctive Caribbean forms of expression. In *The Middle Passage*, Naipaul had also lamented the seduction of an American lifestyle which would lead him to conclude that 'Living in a borrowed culture, the West Indian, more than most, needs writers to tell him who he is and where he stands'.⁴³ For women writers in this period, attempts to make real changes in the world of this borrowed culture would often take priority over creative writing about the position of its occupants. In the debate regarding 'Changing the world versus writing stories', some of the stories would have to wait. As Hodge significantly revealed during our discussion, her second novel, *For The Life of Laetitia*, was begun in 1977 but had to wait almost two decades before it was able to be completed and published.⁴⁴

- ¹ Interview with Velma Pollard and Pam Mordecai by Daryl Cumber Dance at University of West Indies, Kingston, 1980. Published in *New World Adams: Conversations with Contemporary West Indian Writers*, ed. by Daryl Cumber Dance (Leeds: Peepal Tree, 1992), pp. 173-174.
- ² Ramchand's second edition of *The West Indian Novel and its Background*, published in 1985, included an improved figure of 27 novels by West Indian women. This figure reflected the recovery of women's novels, including Rhys's novels of the 1920s and 1930s, and women's presence as novelists was also aided by Ramchand's extension of the period from 1967 to 1982. See Appendix 4. My year-by-year list, widened to account for women publishing work in a variety of forms, appears in Appendix 5.
- ³ See Edward Baugh, 'The Sixties and Seventies', in *West Indian Literature*, ed. by Bruce King, rev. edn (London: Macmillan, 1995; first published in 1979), pp. 63-76 (p. 63). Baugh's account celebrates the achievements of male novelists and poets with only a passing mention of Marion Patrick Jones and Merle Hodge. He reinforces women writers' absence from the 1960s and the '70s by closing the essay with 'By the end of the decade [...] women poets had begun to come splendidly into their own.' (p.74).
- ⁴ Toni Morrison is quoted from an interview with Mari Evans, in '"Not a Story to Pass On": Living Memory and the Slave Sublime', by Paul Gilroy in *A Practical Reader in Contemporary Literary Theory*, ed. by Peter Brooker and Peter Widdowson (London: Prentice Hall/Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1996), p. 413.
- ⁵ For example, in Chapeltown Women Writers, *When Our Ship Comes In: Black Women Talk* (Leeds: Yorkshire Art Circus, 1992).
- ⁶ Author's interview with Tim Diggles, Stoke-on-Trent, 22. 8.95.
- ⁷ Myrna D. Bain, 'Images', *Savacou* 13 (1977), 14-18 (p. 18).
- ⁸ Viv Edwards, *Language in a Black Community* (Clevedon, Avon: Multilingual Matters, 1986), p. 105.
- ⁹ Hugh Boatswain, 'Old Father', in *Writing*, by Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers (London: Centreprise, 1978), p. 45.
- ¹⁰ David Ellis, 'Writing Home: Black Writing in Britain Since the War', unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Essex, 1994, p. 207. Ellis traces the historical development of black writing through a selection of post-war texts which deal with life in Britain. The thesis begins with Selvon, Lamming and Braithwaite and ends with the work of Caryl Phillips, Joan Riley and Dabydeen. There is no reference to the position of women writers within this development prior to Riley.
- ¹¹ From Pearl Connor-Mogotsi's opening address to the '12th International Bookfair of Radical Black and Third World Books', on 23.3.95. in Camden

Centre, London. I am indebted to Dr Anne Walmsley for providing me with a copy of this unpublished paper and for the programme extract detailed in note 12.

- ¹² Information on the life and achievements of Pearl Connor-Mogotsi is taken from the programme of the aforementioned Bookfair.
- ¹³ Pearl Connor-Mogotsi spoke to the audience of a 'A Brighter Sun: A celebration of the Life and work of Sam Selvon', 24 June 1995, London, The Royal Festival Hall.
- ¹⁴ Claudia Jones's speech to the court at her trial in New York in February 1953, in *13 Communists Speak to the Court*, cited in *'I think of my Mother': Notes on the Life and Times of Claudia Jones*, by Buzz Johnson (London: Karia Press, 1985), p. 7. 'Jim Crow' discrimination took various constitutional forms, including a special poll-tax levied on voters which the majority of poor black people could not afford.
- ¹⁵ Ranjana Ash was speaking at the aforementioned symposium on Claudia Jones at the Institute of Commonwealth Studies, London, September 28, 1996. These accounts of Claudia's life were taped and are to be published under the joint editorship of Donald Hinds and Marika Sherwood.
- ¹⁶ Donald Hinds, Claudia Jones's co-worker on the *West Indian Gazette*, paid tribute to her at the symposium.
- ¹⁷ David Roussel-Milner recalled the origins of the first British carnival in his address to the symposium.
- ¹⁸ The organisation of the first carnival is often explained as a response to the murder of Kelso Cochrane in late 1959, but the first carnival was held in fact between the riots in September 1958 and Cochrane's murder. The order of the carnivals was as follows: St Pancras Town Hall, January 1959; Seymore Hall, 1960; Seymore Hall and Manchester Free Trade Hall, 1962; Lyceum, 1963.
- ¹⁹ See David Roussel-Milner, 'False History of Notting Hill Carnival: A Review of Professor Abner Cohen's "Masquerade Politics"', *Association for a People's Carnival Newsletter*, 7 (1996), 8-11.
- ²⁰ Buzz Johnson's biography of Claudia Jones proved impossible to locate through the usual channels. I am indebted to Alan Brown for using his personal contacts to provide me with a copy. My frustrating search for information on Jones seemed aptly summed up, on opening the first page of the book (kindly on loan from Mr Sid Brown) by the stamp: 'Permanently Withdrawn from the Hammersmith and Fulham Public Libraries'.
- ²¹ Claudia Jones, 'To Elizabeth Gurley Flynn', in 'Poems by Claudia Jones', a tribute by Carole Boyce Davies, in *MaComère*, ed. by Jacqueline Brice-Finch

- inaugural issue of the US Journal for The Association of Caribbean Women Writers and Scholars, 1 (1998), 35-37 (p. 36).
- ²² Carole Boyce Davies, in *MaComère*, 1 (1998), 35-37 (p. 35).
- ²³ Pansy Jeffries, Claudia Jones symposium.
- ²⁴ Donald Hinds, 'People of all Races Pay Homage to Claudia Jones,' *West Indian Gazette*, Dec-Jan (1965), cited in Buzz Johnson, *'I think of My Mother': Notes on the Life and Times of Claudia Jones* (London: Karia Press, 1985), pp. 160-162.
- ²⁵ Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, *The Alderson Story, My Life as a Political Prisoner* (New York: International Publishers, [n.d.]), cited in Johnson, p. 35.
- ²⁶ Letter to the author from Gloria Escoffery, 15.8.96.
- ²⁷ Author's interview with Beryl Gilroy, London, 3.8.95.
- ²⁸ Letter to the author from Joyce Gladwell, 22.11.96.
- ²⁹ 'Phyllis Shand Allfrey talking with Polly Pattullo' in *Writing Lives: Conversations between Women Writers* ed. by Mary Chamberlain (London: Virago, 1988), pp. 224-234 (p. 228).
- ³⁰ Chamberlain, p. 229.
- ³¹ In 1953, Allfrey entered three poems for a contest run by the Society of Women Writers and Journalists and was awarded second prize for her poem, 'While the Young Sleep'. See *Caribbean Writers: A Bio-Bibliographical Encyclopaedia* ed. by Donald Herdeck and Margaret Herdeck (Washington: Three Continents Press, 1979), p. 20.
- ³² Herdeck, p. 20.
- ³³ Herdeck, p. 20.
- ³⁴ Chamberlain, p.230.
- ³⁵ Joanna Russ, *How to Suppress Women's Writing* (London: The Women's Press, 1983)
- ³⁶ Anne Walmsley, *The Caribbean Artists Movement*, p.45.
- ³⁷ Bogle-L'Ouverture is named after Deacon Paul Bogle, the influential leader whose Church members were involved in the Jamaican Morant Bay 'rising' of 1865, and Toussaint L'Ouverture, leader of the slave rebellion in San Domingo in 1791. After a 12 year successful revolution, this resulted in the establishment of the black state of Haiti.
- ³⁸ Author's interview with Jessica Huntley, London, 5.6.95.

- ³⁹ See 'Grenada' in *Traveller's Literary Companion: Caribbean*, by James Ferguson and Jason Wilson (Kingston: Ian Randle, 1997), pp. 293-301 (p. 293).
- ⁴⁰ Author's discussion with Merle Hodge, Miami, 27.4.96.
- ⁴¹ Cited in Ferguson, p.300. Merle Collins published a collection, *When the Dawn Breaks, Poems Dedicated to the Grenadian People*, in 1985.
- ⁴² Merle Hodge, 'Challenges of the Struggle for Sovereignty: Changing the World versus Writing Stories', in *Caribbean Women Writers, Essays from the First International Conference*, ed., Selwyn R. Cudjoe (Wellesley: Calaloux, 1990), pp. 202-208. (p. 205).
- ⁴³ V. S. Naipaul, *The Middle Passage* (London: Penguin, 1969; first published, Deutsch, 1962), p. 73.
- ⁴⁴ Author's discussion with Merle Hodge, Miami, 27.4.96.

CHAPTER 4

BOLD EXPERIMENTS IN FORM: NOVELS BY WEST INDIAN WOMEN PUBLISHED IN BRITAIN

4.1 Women Novelists and the Paradox of Their Literary Legacy

If British liberal traditions formed the basis of the West Indian's struggle for independence, it was the British anti-liberal tradition which, by making him colonial, caused him to have to struggle in the first place. From this long and anti-liberal tradition England also profited. Her 'destructive English traditions' which divided class from class were there to serve a purpose. To continue an economic and political arrangement by which, independence attained, the majority of West Indians were illiterate. The writer wanting market and audience had to go to England.¹

The previous Chapter has suggested how members of CAM travelled between Britain and the West Indies in order to keep up their involvement with political matters at home. The reasons for their exile in the first place are outlined in the above description by Sylvia Wynter, writing as a critic in *Jamaica Journal* in 1968. 'The Necessary Background', as Wynter explained, forced writers to reside in Europe or North America, but also enabled them to write about the West Indies from a migrant 'double perspective'. The examples of novels that follow have been selected in order to offer a necessary contrast to the autobiographies discussed in Chapter 6, which are focused on the experience of writers who transferred to Britain. The inclusion of novels with West Indian concerns corrects an otherwise skewed picture that might (falsely) suggest that writing from the period under consideration is exclusively focused on the authors' British predicament. As Edward Brathwaite argued in 'West Indian Prose Fiction in the Sixties: A Survey':

In the fifties (which saw the first steady publication of work on the international market), one got the impression that West Indian writing, though

largely and quite naturally concerned with the islands, was somehow orientated towards metropolitan Britain - a kind of migration complex corresponding to the actual migration of a crucial proportion of West Indian 'surplus' labour. Lamming, Selvon, Mittelholzer, Carew, Salkey, John Hearne, E.R. Brathwaite, Mais and Naipaul were all living in Britain and books like *The Emigrants* (1954), *The Lonely Londoners* (1956), *To Sir, With Love* (1959), and most of *Voices under the Window* (1955) reflected West Indian life abroad. [...] In the sixties, most West Indian writers were still living abroad and many of their books were still understandably about this situation.[...] But West Indian writing had to a large extent returned to its base in the islands.²

By the sixties, a distinctly West Indian novel was established, even though it still faced the problem of audience that Wynter described. Some writers shared the sentiment expressed by Michael Anthony that he 'never had any desire to write about England. [and that he] did not even develop any of the unfortunate feelings of frustration and disturbance that sometimes bedevil "the writer in exile"'.³

The West Indian novels of Ashe, Wynter and Hodge discussed below are part of a relatively young literary tradition, which appears to have begun with C.L.R. James's *Minty Alley* in the 1930s, and which continued in a proliferation of fiction with Caribbean settings such as Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* and Andrew Salkey's *A Quality of Violence*. This chapter explores the ambitions of three women writers who experimented with a fluid European literary form, employed imaginatively to represent different aspects of the voided history of the Caribbean and its peoples. In contrast to the autobiographies considered in Chapter 6, the fictions presented here have a different relationship to notions of authenticity, realism and verisimilitude than the implicit 'it really happened that way' of autobiography. As works of the imagination, the novels demonstrate a fundamental problem for creative writers who had to struggle to find a language, style and form which would represent a society that had been traditionally ignored or represented *for them* in European literary terms. Women writing novels about Caribbean history, cultural politics and West Indian family life had been educated in the European literary tradition which denied them appropriate

role models. Before the 1970s, the novels of Jean Rhys, Phyllis Allfrey, Eliot Bliss and Ada Quayle were barely known and the authors' societal position, as descendants of the white plantocracy, incurred ambivalent reactions to their status as West Indian writers. Novels by African-Caribbean and Indo-Caribbean women appeared not to exist. Evelyn O'Callaghan's work in *Woman Version* was stimulated by the sorry admission that 'When I first began to study West Indian fiction in the 1970s, I was under the impression that there were no women writers from the region apart from Jean Rhys, *and* there was some reservation about her.'⁴

Caribbean writers sometimes acknowledge that their invisibility and their lack of literary role-models is bound up in a paradox: that their experience of European 'classic' novels, delivered through a colonial system of education, was in some ways, a mixed blessing. As Jamaica Kincaid insists: 'Included in the bad things, you get some good things too.'⁵ On this point, she recalls a Walcott poem which illustrates this dichotomy: it flourishes the poet's own literary skills in a way that simultaneously allows him to remonstrate against the double-bind of his colonial literary legacy:

I who am poisoned with the blood of both
where shall I turn, divided to the vein
I who have cursed
The drunken officer of British rule, how choose
Between this Africa and the English tongue I love?⁶

In company with O'Callaghan, writers from the 1950s and 1960s lament the fact that, in the course of their imperial tutelage, they had limited access to a novel set in, or written by, a Caribbean.⁷ This situation was much improved by the '70s when Caribbean novels had been placed on the CXC syllabi, a change which would help shift the privilege away from European culture. Nevertheless, Walcott, Gilroy and Kincaid would be ambivalent about the loss of novelists like Dickens, Austen and Walter Scott in their own education. Caribbean writers

clearly value 'the classics' that determined their development, and find some difficulty in denying the richness of their European models. However, their dilemma lies in the obvious fact that the great European tradition was imposed as part of a cultural hegemony that invalidated a history which, rendered invisible, would have to be recovered in the process of their own writing. Writers speak of their extensive theoretical knowledge of an English geography, countryside, flora and fauna, much of which was unimaginable (daffodils and snow were unknown in the Caribbean setting). Much of the writing studied in this thesis, fictive and autobiographical, testifies to the fact that writers had little or no access to examples of an imaginative response which might correlate with their own experience of space, time and environment. The women authors considered here had to find a fictional world-view that would later be richly explored in the work of Erna Brodber, Olive Senior, Velma Pollard, Pauline Melville and Grace Nichols. Janice Shinebourne claimed that when she came to write her first novel set in Guyana, having been apprenticed to European literature, she encountered a particular difficulty: 'The landscape was different. How would I portray the landscape? There wasn't a precedent.'⁸ In contrast, Beryl Gilroy remembered the excitement of finding and reading Mittleholzer's *Corentyne Thunder* (1941), which was actually set in the area around her Guyanese village.⁹ Clearly, there were available examples of writing about the Caribbean landscape and people, but they were negated (Mittleholzer was regarded by the locals as one of the 'mads') by the 'great' European literature which future writers were educated to appreciate. This disparagement of home-grown writing is illustrated in a pertinent example offered by Carole Boyce Davies. In *Out of the KUMBLA*, she tells of borrowing a copy of *The Hills of Hebron* from a public library around the time of its first issue in 1962: 'I read it and it was interesting but, caught as I was in studying all that English colonial literature over and over again, it automatically got relegated to secondary status in my consciousness.'¹⁰ Aspiring Caribbean novelists learned what constituted 'a novel' through the examples held up to them, examples which had been determined by a metropolitan canon reflecting

Matthew Arnold's notion of a culture that would '... make the best that has been thought and known in the world current everywhere; to make all men live in an atmosphere of sweetness and light.'¹¹ For Caribbean writers it was a canon that had maintained their exclusion, but which they would challenge by way of some one hundred and sixty novels published in Britain between 1950 and 1969.¹²

There were some significant novels published for children and adolescents during the late 1960s and throughout the '70s which are often excluded from the corpus of Caribbean literature but which warrant more serious critical attention (see Appendix 5). These include: Wynter and Carew's adaptation of *Black Midas* for schools (1969); Jean D' Costa's *Sprat Morrison* (1972), *Escape to Last Man Peak* (1975), and *Voice in the Wind* (1978); and Petronella Breinburg's *Us Boys of Westcroft* (1975). However, the three novels discussed below have been selected from a list of fiction for adults. The thirty-two women's novels published between 1948 and 1979 cover a range of genres, and illustrate the influence of 'popular' American and European genres as well as 'literary' ones. These include the historical fiction of Ada Quayle in *The Mistress* (1957), and a number of historical-type romances, exemplified by the island sagas of Jeanne Wilson in *Weep in the Sun* (1976) and *Troubled Heritage* (1977), who also wrote in the murder-mystery genre in her *No Medicine for Murder* series (1967). There are also some early and fledgling attempts at romance writing (à la Mills and Boon) in a Caribbean setting. The Barbadian Lucille Reid, for example, published *Love in the Sun* with Gibson Press, a vanity publisher, in 1975, a novel which blends elements of the romance and the thriller with a generational plot revolving around the Gamble family. The following passage represents this blend in Reid's description of a murderer being despatched to his life-sentence. His girl friend, Loleta, expresses her loss in terms which now read as unintentionally comic:

At once she ran to Tony and attempted to slap his face but she fell hitting the ground with a loud thud. Tony who was the last to enter the prisoners' van watched as Loleta fell. The van was driven off to prison. Loleta became hysterical. She was tearing at her hair. 'My Dick!' she kept saying. 'I have lost

my Dick.' By this time the crowd from the courtroom gathered round. Everyone felt sorry and disgusted at what had happened to her fiancée. Very soon an ambulance came and Loleta was taken away.¹³

Vanity-publishing would provide the only outlet for some Caribbean women writers who were determined to see their work in print. In the same year, Clara Rosa de Lima's romance with a Carnival setting *Not Bad, Just a Little Mad*, was released through a Devonian publisher, Stockwell:

A sensuous love story centred around the fortunes of two sisters, Anne and Sheelah. Spiced with the steaming passions and heady rhythms of Trinidad, the story culminates in the excitement of Carnival with all its spontaneous gaiety, colour, music and drunken excesses, and its final welding together of two people.¹⁴

But the three novels selected for discussion here are examples of experiments with a Caribbean *literary* form, rather than the more familiar excursions into popular genres. The novels are dealt with chronologically, but this is done in the knowledge of the disparity between production and publication dates, since we have already noted examples of delays between completion and publication which appear to corroborate the tendency of women writers to retain unpublished manuscripts for many years (rejected or unsubmitted). There are different reasons for these delays in publication which often connect with changes in audience and taste. Jean D'Costa, for example, completed *Sprat Morrison* in 1968 for an audience of school children between the ages of ten and twelve, but it was not published until 1972. Joyce Johnson explains:

D'Costa recognised specific constraints on the use of language, for there was still widespread disapproval of the Creole amongst educators and parents. Many parents associated the Creole with low social status, and teachers preparing children for examinations to be written in standard English did not welcome reading material which might increase the currency of Jamaican Creole.¹⁵

The completion of Merle Hodge's *For the Life of Laetitia* was delayed for many years, and Beryl Gilroy's *In Praise of Love and Children* waited thirty years to find an appropriate publisher. Thus both should really be included in a full discussion of novels written in this period. Similarly, we should not ignore Janice Shinebourne's achievement in publishing her Guyanese novel, *Timepiece*, in 1986 with Peepal Tree. The author claims that the novel was completed twelve years before: '*Timepiece* was conceived in 1965, completed in 1974 although I had written most of it in the 60s.' She needed, she said, 'to record my own experiences but to look back to see it in the context of what was happening in Guyana at the time.'¹⁶ As the female child of a Chinese shopkeeper and an Indian mother, this female perspective on the political and interracial conflicts in Guyana appeared to be non-existent at the time of its production. Ironically, C.L.R. James announced in 1962 in a letter to *The Times Literary Supplement* on 'The Caribbean Mixture', that 'A Chinese writer is due at any moment'.¹⁷

A quest, in the 1950s and '60s, to author *the* Caribbean novel would not prevent one of its most successful exponents declaiming the genre's inappropriateness. George Lamming recently stated that 'I find the novel very limiting as an art form.'¹⁸ By this limitation, he was referring to the inaccessibility of a form that is still regarded as elitist to the majority of the population. In terms of structure, language, style and content, Caribbean women writers needed to challenge the limitations of a form delivered to them through European literary models in the way that their African-American counterparts were to do very successfully. Toni Morrison described *Beloved* as 'Outside of most of the formal constricts of the novel'.¹⁹ Getting outside of 'the formal constricts of the novel' is an ambitious project for any writer regardless of their cultural heritage, but the following section will argue that Sylvia Wynter's *The Hills of Hebron* is the first serious attempt to do this in the period under discussion.

4.2 Sylvia Wynter's *The Hills of Hebron* and the Case for New Readings

The Hills of Hebron by the Cuban-born novelist Sylvia Wynter, was published in London in 1962 at a time when there appeared to be few anglophone women novelists. It is consequently one of the few literary works by a West Indian woman to receive the critical attention of Kenneth Ramchand. In his influential 1970 study, *The West Indian Novel and its background*, Ramchand criticised Wynter's novel for being 'an overloaded work by a West Indian intellectual anxious to touch upon as many themes as possible'.²⁰ The novel might now be reassessed usefully, by examining the terms of Ramchand's criticism and Wynter's own reservations about its ambitions. At the time of its publication, critics and reviewers encountered an experiment in form which, it was generally held, did not fully succeed. However, the present section will argue that we may now reread the novel somewhat differently, and in a sense reclaim it, in the wake of literary writing which has emerged since, including that by African, Latin American, Caribbean and African-American women.

The conditions under which Wynter's novel came to be written are significant in that they indicate that the author was heavily, and possibly negatively, influenced by her partner. In the early 1960s, Wynter was living in London with Jan Carew, writing for radio and television and circulating with West Indian students, writers and intellectuals. Anne Walmsley's observation, during our discussion, that, whilst Wynter was married to Jan Carew, there 'was no question of her emerging and being herself'²¹ would seem to be corroborated by the following remarks of her former husband:

Dance: I know you and your former wife did one play together. Did you frequently collaborate?

Carew: We frequently collaborated; it was a weird kind of thing at a certain point. When we were very very close, it was difficult to separate things. I was exercising enormous influences on her and she on me. And you know, her novel *The Hills of Hebron* is about half my own (I wrote about half - or more than half of it - which Andrew Salkey recognised instantly). But it was very

difficult to disentangle my part and hers, and I find that kind of collaboration really disastrous on your own work because it causes a kind of tension. I think you can live with a writer, but you have to go completely your separate ways. Sylvia was immensely talented - up to a certain point.²²

Carew's claim that he wrote 'more than half' of *The Hills of Hebron* is matched by rumours that Wynter 'largely wrote [Carew's] *Black Midas*', and, of course, they did openly collaborate on the version of *Black Midas* for schools.²³ The 'tension' produced by their 'disastrous' collaboration may have worked equally against both them, except that it was Carew who emerged as the award-winning novelist and dramatist. Wynter had turned her attention from co-authoring dramas for the theatre and the BBC with Carew, such as *Miracle in Lime Lane* (performed in Jamaica in 1962), to the singular activity of writing a novel. 'Immensely talented - up to a certain point', she might have developed into the woman novelist that Lamming and C.L.R. James were still 'waiting for' in 1980, but *The Hills of Hebron* remained Wynter's only published attempt to fill that void. And possibly one of the many reasons for this was the nature of Carew's influence which, we might imagine, was a mixed blessing for a West Indian woman novelist in the early 1960s, trying to find a fictive voice in a male arena, whilst simultaneously trying to experiment with the formal conventions.

If we consider the reception of Wynter's novel, we see that, in the main, critics found it flawed on formal grounds: it was too long, had too many characters, was didactic, and was complicated in its structure. Even Selwyn Cudjoe's appraisal in 1990 is apologetic:

Although the novel may be much too long in parts and somewhat overbearing in its didacticism, it captures the sense of restlessness with the past and the need to break out of discourses and practices that are designed to keep us coffined within an alien ideology and culture.²⁴

The formal 'problems' are inextricable from the struggle to 'break out of discourses' which were colonial, patriarchal and largely alien to the people they

represented. For a woman writer to escape from patriarchy and nationhood, she would need to re-work the various strands of this inheritance. Elleke Boehmer describes the nature of this challenge as a need to

...interrupt the language of official discourse and literature with a woman's vocalicity. Nationhood is so bound up in textuality, in definitive 'histories' and official languages and mythologies, that to compose a substantially different kind of text, using vernacular forms that are part of people's experience, is already to challenge normative discourses of nationhood.²⁵

Discovering vernacular forms that are part of people's experience in a non-literary society would not immediately find resolution in the form of a novel. Connecting language and form in a way that represented an essentially peasant society was a problem that concerned many Caribbean writers in early 1960s. Wynter had the additional problem that a 'womanist' version, as it is now understood through the work of Nwapa, Emecheta, Morrison or Walker, did not exist. In the West Indian fiction published by men, as Wynter said, 'women as women - they're just not there.'²⁶ Her novel is, therefore, an ambitious attempt to address absences (the invisibility of 'real' women and an invalidated history of Jamaican society) which compete for attention, and which may result in the overload which Ramchand identified. Wynter confronts a set of paradoxes concerned with Jamaica's struggle for a communal identity, a struggle which is bound up in the various strands of an African heritage, religious manipulation, and the crippling poverty which colonialism maintains. In a sense, the central character is the drought the novel focuses on, and the community's responses to it; in this respect, *The Hills of Hebron* has a similar theme to Andrew Salkey's *A Quality of Violence*. However, Wynter's novel is also an exploration of a *gendered paradox*, in that leadership is initially in the hands of domineering but (what Daryl Cumber Dance describes as) 'weak and impotent' males.²⁷

The novel engages with the actions of a corrupt and megalomaniac religious leader, Moses, and the 'pocomania' sect who follow him to exile in their 'Hebron',

a land of freedom. The character of the leader, and the sect, are based on the historical events of The Jordanites, a twentieth-century Guyanese sect. As further evidence of the sharing of fictive ideas by herself and Carew, Wynter suggests that the novel was based on 'the idea of Bedward, and then mixed with the Jordan in Guyana who also actually attempted to crucify himself, and in fact Jan Carew uses Jordan's crucifixion in *Black Midas*.²⁸ The novel is essentially concerned with the symbolic future of this leaderless community of people, with their attempts to relate to each other and to their past, as described by the author thus:

The novel has to do with a community which stops worshipping the dead prophet founder and comes to an awareness of itself. The suggestion was that this worship of a dead past had also been a kind of exile. So here were multiple exiles, and one has to do with exile from a tradition - the tradition of Africa.²⁹

By means of a set of temporal disruptions in the text, Wynter makes connections between strands of history, colonial ruptures of identity, and the relationship of these to patriarchy. She chose these complex themes, which she remained enthusiastic about, but the novel failed to resolve the textual difficulties presented by such an ambitious project. Wynter fails, by her own admission, to 'break out of discourses and practices' which are implicit in a European realist form. Much later, when she was able to reflect on the idea of the novel, she regarded the outcome as only a partial success:

I think the idea of the novel was a very good one. I would actually like to use it again. I think the theme was excellent. But I failed with it because I wasn't bold enough to have broken away from the format of the realist novel. The magic realism of say Gabriel Garcia Marquez in Latin America - that's what I should have done with the novel; but at that time, of course, novels like that hadn't been written, so I didn't have it as a model, and I myself was not inventive enough to create such a model.³⁰

In terms of its lack of inventiveness, and its reluctance to experiment with an anti-realist form, it was no less a success than other similar attempts, such as *A Quality of Violence*. Salkey's attempt to represent a peasant class is less

ambitious, but is also beset by the difficulty of imposing a realist form on the representation of spiritual lives which do not relate to a Christian-European understanding of religious practices.

Significantly, Wynter initially chose to represent the power and effect of African pocomanian magic through theatre. Michael Reckford describes how *The Hills of Hebron* developed out of her Royal Court stage play, 'Under the Sun'. This was clearly considered successful enough to warrant a radio version, which was broadcast in several countries in Europe and America.³¹ Theatre would not necessarily connect with the peasant class that concerned Wynter, but it might relate more easily to the logic of a Jamaican popular culture and its storytelling; and as an intellectual, Wynter's important reference material was indeed Jamaican folklore. She was sent regularly to the country, where she lived with grandparents, and describes this connection as very important: 'they were sort of peasant families, and therefore in my childhood I lived in a popular cultural tradition'.³²

If we re-examine a 1962 review of the novel, we might be able to imagine how the boldness of Wynter's project was received. The critic for *The Times Literary Supplement* would have anticipated a British readership with little knowledge of the history of Jamaican popular forms and of the complexities presented by a fusion of African and Christian religious practices:

Anyone who has read Mr V.S. Naipaul's monitory travel meditation *The Middle Passage* is aware of the dangerously explosive quality of Rastafarism and other movements exploiting black-white hatred in the West Indies, especially Jamaica. Miss Sylvia Wynter, the first West Indian woman novelist has chosen this theme for an ambitious study of the lunatic religious fringe in Jamaica. It may appear strange, extravagant, and sensational. But it is not far from actuality.³³

The review suggests, via a reference to Naipaul's explication of Rastafarism, published the same year, that *The Hills of Hebron* is authentic, and in the process, manages to reinforce images of unruly natives who are 'dangerously explosive'

on removal of the civilising constraints of Empire. The critic is also bound by his own notions of a reality which accorded with British imperialist codes of decency and conduct. He denies the possibility of atrocities which Wynter represents, and suggests that: 'Credulity is strained when for example the police fire again and again into a mob without first firing a volley into the air.'³⁴ Nevertheless, the reviewer recognises the ambition of Wynter's theme and, momentarily, she is 'the first West Indian woman novelist', while also asserting that '*The Hills of Hebron* betrays the limitations of an apprentice author in tackling a complex subject.' If patronising in tone, the review nevertheless accords with Wynter's own assessment of the novel. But what is of interest for a later reading is the revelation of the novel's formal properties which the critic identifies as problematical in terms of a classic realist model. It is the structural 'flaws' he describes in the work which offer some indication of Wynter's achievements, and which suggest the inventiveness of the early work of Toni Morrison:

The story weaves somewhat backwards and forwards in time. The large cast of characters is difficult to hold in mind. Digressions are sometimes too long and at other times unnecessary. The same event is repeated from two points of view without sufficient novelty to justify the repetition.³⁵

Contemporary readers would probably now recognise these features as strategies employed in African-American women's writing. *The Hills of Hebron* has a structural inventiveness which has since been theorised as 'postmodern' and 'womanist'. For example, if we compare the structure of Wynter's novel with *A Quality of Violence*, then significant differences emerge. Salkey's first novel also represents the power of Obeah and the death of a pocomanian leader who, the reader learns, is also a ruthless confidence trickster. However, *A Quality of Violence* has a linear narrative which begins with the Marshalls' decision to leave St Thomas-in-the-East because of the severity of the drought, and progresses through a chronology of power-struggles between individuals and the reason and

magic they represent. Events move forward through the increasingly violent events of the meeting-house, towards the novel's epilogue:

The drought continued for a long time.

Rain threatened, but that was all.

The procession and the others drifted apart. Some moved to other parts of St Thomas-in-the-East, some to other parishes, some nearer the coast, and some to other islands. The Marshalls went to Haiti.

Yet, for those who remained in St Thomas-in-the-East, there was something else to which they could look forward. They had the Great Earthquake of 1907 which would somehow make them forget the carrion-crow.³⁶

Salkey's concern with the survival of the peasant community and with its place in the history of the Caribbean, is related within the confines of his narrative (the events of days rather than years) which only deviates from its linear progression in the above prolepsis toward the Great Earthquake of 1907. In comparison, Wynter finds new ways of disrupting the linear narrative to forge connections between subjectivity, history and memory. The following passage is an example of 'the weaving backwards and forwards in time' which the apprentice author Salkey does not attempt and which the *TLS* critic foregrounds as part of the burden of Wynter's story. The flashback occurs in church, and whilst Miss Gatha challenges the elder Obadiah to defend his vow of celibacy, the narrative diverts to another character. Sister Sue is hot and bored and the sensation of her 'too tight shoes' provokes a memory of her 'too tight vagina' and an encounter with Miss Gatha's dead husband, the Prophet Moses:

The shed at the back of the shop had been close and hot. The midday sun crackled against the zinc roofing, and her young bare legs stung with the heat that rose up from the earthen floor. One minute she had been helping Prophet Moses to sort out the gifts which his followers had brought, the next she was lying on her back with the Prophet's bushy beard looming above her. He pulled her skirt, urgently fumbling with the safety pin, and explained that the sacrifice of her virginity was necessary to their successful exodus into the promised land of Hebron. She helped him with the pin. She felt lapped in the warm still air and casually acquiescent. But she was too much in awe of the Prophet to look at him. She kept her eyes fixed on the roof, on the pencils of

light which pierced through holes in the zinc sheets and played hide-and-seek in his matted hair. From the yard came the sharp smell of fish. Miss Gatha knocked on the door and shook it violently. But Prophet Moses had locked the door when they entered, had snapped the padlock shut. Miss Gatha knocked again. The Prophet did not cease the rhythmic rise and fall of his body against hers, but called out that he was praying for the soul of a young Sister and could not be interrupted.³⁷

Wynter's inventiveness is exemplified by a sophisticated use of analepsis, to use Genette's term for the flashback, which in this case connects the history of past relationships to present encoded conflicts: for example, Sister Sue's deflowering at the hands of her religious guru mirrors the hypocrisy which Miss Gatha seeks to expose in the elder churchmen through her challenge to Obadiah. The casual demand of obedience from the Prophet suggests other sexual encounters and explains the intensity of jealousy and competition that divide the female church members. Women's devotion and subjugation is demonstrated in Sue being 'too much in awe of the Prophet to look at him.' The language of religious fanaticism is comic and allows the irony of such devotion to connect the past with the tensions of the scene in the church. Wynter also juxtaposes the church and the scene in the present with vivid sensory information from the past: the smell, heat, sound and touch of the dead Prophet with his 'bushy beard' and his 'matted hair', while the scene of his conquest emerges through contrasting images: 'From the yard came the sharp smell of fish' and 'She felt lapped in the warm still air.'

In addition to a structural inventiveness which is proleptic of later work by others, *The Hills of Hebron* explores themes and uses textual devices which anticipated those developed by Toni Morrison in *Song of Solomon* and *Beloved*. Wynter's symbolic use of a biblical analogy, by giving its characters *Old Testament* names, predates *Song of Solomon* by eighteen years. Wynter, like Morrison, also uses material objects which act as lost pieces of the jigsaw puzzle for a people without an official history: fragments of an unrecorded and unknown history are attached to them, like the quilt in *Beloved* and the watermark on Ruth Dead's table in *Song of Solomon*. In the absence of a written history, they are the

means by which significant events are kept alive in memory, and *The Hills of Hebron* has the Spanish Jar which Sister Sue finds in thick undergrowth:

For the New Believers the jar belonged to a precise past of facts and dates and figures of which they were totally ignorant. And even if they had been able to read, in the history books they would have found themselves only in the blank spaces between the lines, in the dashes, the pauses between commas, semicolons, colons, in the microcosmic shadow world between full stops.
(p.53)

Wynter's use of the Spanish Jar would indeed resemble Morrison's interweaving of past and present, were it not for her lapse into the didacticism for which she has also been criticised. Having stated that the New Believers had no knowledge of their history, in a subsequent passage Wynter's intrusive narrator sets the record straight:

And when the sugar-coated empire was crumbling away, Queen Victoria bestowed upon them a freedom that was more shadow than substance. They cried out to her that hunger was darkening their eyes so that they could not see this freedom, and she told them to make bread from their sweat. And black deacon Bogle led them in a rebellion, but the Lord was not on their side, and Governor Eyre hanged them in their hundreds, so that along the sea-shore the coconut palms were as innumerable crucifixions against the sky.
(p.54)

Wynter's other significant 'flaw' for the *TLS* critic - her tendency to overload the novel with a concern for numerous characters and their collective histories - is also exemplified in the above passage. However, this discourse of the collective rather than the personal is also now a thematic concern for African-American women writers and represents a strategy which is in direct contrast to the individualism of much previous fiction which has centred on the mythic construction of the protagonist and his (usually) quest. Wynter's novel represents a deep concern with history and the need to revise colonial constructions of identity. Her work is part of that fictional counter-current that Brathwaite identified, which opposed the novels of the 1950s and early '60s which displayed

'an impatience with what the West Indies had to offer'.³⁸ Brathwaite might have had Wynter's novel in mind in the following quotation:

But what about the writers who are concerned mainly with the Gips of the islands and their children; that apparently deprived section - by far the majority - still shocked from slavery and indentured labour, the people without cultural houses whose lives, in Derek Walcott's phrase, 'revolve round prison, graveyard, church.'³⁹

Wynter's ambitions result in a text which suggests that a Caribbean future must take account of the past in order to 'come to an awareness of itself'. Suggestive of, say, Morrison's *Song of Solomon*, it weaves lyrically backwards and forwards to explore the wilderness years of slavery which severed African-Caribbeans from their roots, their Gods, and their history, and to expose something of the weakness of patriarchy at times of crisis: the women may be subjugated, but in Wynter's novel, as in Morrison's, it is *they who are strong* and who ensure the survival of the community. Miss Gatha emerges as the only character with the necessary resourcefulness and leadership qualities to bring the community through the drought and to fill the void left by the Prophet Moses, even if her reasons for ensuring the survival of the community are selfish and suspect.⁴⁰ But while *The Hills of Hebron* may be 'flawed' by its ambitions, if read now in the light of Toni Morrison's work, its historical sweep takes on a very different, if not wholly successful, aspect. In an interview in which Wynter is both defensive and self-belittling, she admits that the novel contains 'a lot of unsolved problems' but also admits to a certain pride that carried her forward.⁴¹ She tells Dance that 'you write a novel, and you should have the time to continue with other novels, which I've just not had for all kinds of reasons.'⁴² The reasons cited are, typically practical ones:

I don't think that women have played a large role as yet in fiction. I think there are all kinds of reasons why not. I had no choice after this novel. If I'd stayed in London, I'd have continued writing novels. But once I went back to

the Caribbean I had to take a job and support the two children, and then I started to teach.⁴³

The Hills of Hebron's mixed reception did not however, prevent a second, somewhat delayed, attempt. Some twenty years later, she was working on a novel entitled *The Work* which she tells Dance, is 'historical faction, something like *Roots*'.⁴⁴ That novel has not been published and Wynter remains best-known as a dramatist and postcolonial critic: contemporary critics recognise her adaptations for the theatre, radio and television, and her scholarship and literary criticism is highly regarded. But her achievement as a novelist is often overlooked: significantly, *The Hills of Hebron* receives no mention in either Bruce King's *West Indian Literature* or in *A Reader's Guide to West Indian and Black British Literature*.⁴⁵ Even in the first collection of essays concerned with the recuperation of Caribbean women's writing, Selwyn Cudjoe emphasises only the *historical* importance of Wynter's novel:

The last work of importance in the first phase of Caribbean women's writing was Sylvia Wynter's *Hills of Hebron* (1966) [*sic*], which brings to a close a particular kind of public speaking about the Caribbean self and represents the culmination of a discourse that emphasised the collective rather than the personal self.⁴⁶

Perhaps new readings will be able to reclaim the work for its important *aesthetic* innovations, particularly in terms of its early experimentation with a postcolonial 'woman's vocality.'

4.3 Cultural Schizophrenia: Merle Hodge's *Crick Crack, Monkey* and *For The Life of Laetitia*

Crick Crack, Monkey is not in need of reclamation: as a result of Marjorie Thorpe's insistence that it should be available for her literature syllabus, it came back into print in the 1980s and features in Caribbean literary-critical

discussions, literary histories and doctoral theses as a significant text from the middle part of the period under consideration. However, it is presented here by way of contrast to the other two novels and as a means of exploring some of the reasons for its continued availability and success. In this last respect, it is probably as well that Hodge did not share Wynter's ambition in *The Hills of Hebron* to represent the multiple perspectives of an African-Caribbean community and its quest for survival. By contrast, in Hodge's fictive work, the focus is on a single character's development rather than that of a whole community, and consequently its mode is more familiar and manageable (except for British reviewers). In the following section, it will be argued that the status of Hodge's novel, as opposed to Wynter's, is occasioned by its ability to be situated in a wider literary corpus concerned with the deracination of the child subject. Unlike the other two novels in this chapter, Hodge's work finds its place in Caribbean literary histories because, amongst other things, it is accessible to a postcolonial Caribbean educational market in terms of subject-matter, language and form. It represents a kind of Caribbean equivalent to such texts of working-class fiction as *Kes* and *A Taste of Honey*, which provide an alternative to the 'classics' for the secondary-school market. As a bildungsroman, *Crick Crack, Monkey* is concerned with the particular viewpoint of an African-Caribbean child and her growing awareness of cultural schizophrenia and in this is particularly appropriate as a teaching tool for exploring the pressure exerted on Caribbean children to negate the world of their family and community in order to succeed.

As a form of cultural history, the present study has been equally concerned to establish the conditions which produced women's texts at a time when Caribbean women writers were held to be non-existent. Hodge explains how she came to consider writing fiction as follows:

I began writing, in my adult life, in protest against my education and the arrogant assumptions upon which it rested: that I and my world were nothing

and that to rescue ourselves from nothingness, we had best seek admission to the world of *their* storybook.⁴⁷

In constituting a child as her literary subject matter, Hodge exposes some of the sacrifices entailed in her own efforts to gain access 'to the world of *their* storybook'. The conditions in which the novel came to be written and was eagerly received by a publisher are presented below. In 1970, when *Crick Crack, Monkey* was published, Hodge was only the second black Caribbean woman writer, following Wynter, to receive British critical attention and was a new talent that Andre Deutsch considered worth nurturing. There was no hawking of the manuscript for Hodge: as Diana Athill remembered, 'She had no trouble finding a publisher'.⁴⁸ As was discussed in Chapter 3, Hodge was fortunate to benefit from the patronage of Athill because, in the late 1960s when she was writing, there would have been few specialist (black or women's) publishers on the horizon. For Deutsch to take an interest in such work at all, it had to be considered marketable for a British readership. It is clear from Athill's responses to Walmsley's questioning that she developed writers whom she regarded as talented by establishment literary standards, including Jean Rhys, V.S. Naipaul, Earl Lovelace and Michael Anthony. Deutsch opposed the publication of a writer simply on the grounds that they were 'writing back' from a former colony: 'our line had always been that a writer was a writer'.⁴⁹ Athill's conviction that publishing should be concerned primarily with quality and not ideology, is some indication of her investment in Hodge and the faith that she had in the quality and potential of her writing.

Hodge was a writer who, like Michael Anthony, appeared to have no interest in writing about England. She settled in London only for the period of her studies at the University of London (1962 -1967), after which she travelled through Europe and returned to the Caribbean in 1970. However, she was very much engaged with political events in England when she wrote *Crick Crack, Monkey*. Like Allfrey, and many other women writers in this study who prioritised politics over personal expression, she juggled her creative work with postgraduate study

on French Negritude and with activism. Uneasy with the growing tensions surrounding the Enoch Powell rally, she joined the Black Panther organisation and devoted time to demonstrations, working with fellow-Trinidadian Althea Jones.⁵⁰ Unlike the autobiographers discussed in Chapter 6, Hodge did not write about this period of racial tension in London, but chose to return to the alienated world of 'their story book', that is, the Trinidad of her childhood. Her inspiration to write a novel may have been stimulated by her involvement, in London, with the Caribbean Artists Movement. However, she presented her public self as a scholar rather than an aspiring novelist at this time, in 1969, speaking on the poetry of Leon Damas and participating in a critical panel at the third CAM conference. Hodge might have been expected to take advantage of what CAM had to offer as a critical platform for new writers but her reticence prevented her from presenting her creative work to that audience.⁵¹ In the late 1960s she had difficulty imagining herself as a novelist, and during my discussion with her in 1996, she claimed still to experience difficulty in describing herself this way. This reluctance to advance her creative talents is some indication of the likely importance to her of Diana Athill, and later Marjorie Thorpe, in encouraging her to bring her two novels to publication. Without their respective interventions, Hodge may well have lost confidence in her work.

Crick Crack, Monkey has little in common with *The Hills of Hebron* and we can explore Hodge's text in order to suggest why one might be regarded as an aesthetic success and the other a failure. In terms of language, structure, setting and theme, the novel appears, as Cudjoe maintains, to have 'ushered in a new era' in women's writing from the anglophone Caribbean.⁵² As a woman novelist, Hodge had few (if any) predecessors and she would have had to look to West Indian men if she were seeking role-models. In respect of its style, it bears some relationship to the work of her fellow-Trinidadians, Anthony and Selvon. *Crick Crack* shares something of Anthony's 'deceptively simple prose skilfully controlled' in *Green Days by the River*, and its double-edged narrative of the comic and the tragic is reminiscent of Selvon.⁵³ The narration is structured, as

critics are apt to point out, by the 'double-voicing' of an adult remembering a child's experience, and herein lies its strength.⁵⁴ The originality of the story rests on a world-view which, though it typifies an African-Caribbean experience, had been barely represented hitherto. The novel concerns the development of Tee, growing up in Trinidad in a family split by the class and caste-ridden legacy of colonialism. The child finds herself torn between two conflicting codes of behaviour following the death of her mother during childbirth. Her absent father has migrated to England, leaving Tee in the midst of a fight over her upbringing. It is through the two aunts that Hodge problematises the losses and gains of neo-colonial bourgeois values. The loveless Aunt Beatrice, who Tantie refers to as 'the bitch', is comfortably-off, middle-class, and values everything English. Beatrice has reared two sullen, but socially acceptable, pale-skinned daughters, and she immediately sets about the process of minimising Tee's 'niggeryness'.⁵⁵ Before her mother's death, Tee had spent many happy and carefree vacations with the other aunt, Tantie who is a fiery black African-Caribbean Creole, warm, working-class and endlessly accommodating of Indo-Caribbean waifs and strays, and who is, by implication, dismissive of caste and cultural difference. In the characters of the two aunts, Hodge sets up the divide between a pretentious black (or rather a necessarily pale-skinned version of black) bourgeoisie, and the unaffected, but materially impoverished, warmth of the extended Creole family. The language used to describe the two aunts reinforces distinctions between the 'natural' curiosity of the child and the imposition of a code of 'civilised' behaviour. The narrator repeatedly uses animal metaphors to describe Tantie's side in a way that suggests a wholesome spontaneity: 'Tantie's company was loud and hilarious and the intermittent squawk and flurry of mirth made me think of the fowl-run when something fell into the midst of the fat hens.' (p.4) The opposing worlds are juxtaposed through, on the one hand, the language of Tee's heart, Creole, and on the other, the standard English which is the language of Beatrice. The language of the oppressor is resisted in the verbal challenges - vicious, unpredictable and wickedly effective - that are issued by Tantie. Hodge

compensates for Tantie's social powerlessness by endowing her language with a passion and a creativity which allows her to fight authority. Beatrice's clipped English reflects the emotional distance brought about by long-imposed colonial models of behaviour which involve constant deferral to the accepted codes. Aunt Beatrice has sacrificed her own spirit in the adoption of 'Englishness', and continues to reinforce this effect upon her own children and Tee and Toddan. In this she and her family are modern-day versions of the 'spirit thievery' of slavery.⁵⁶ Whereas Tantie's children are 'bush monkeys' (animal metaphor again), Beatrice's daughter is 'skinny and finicky with large eyes that were perpetually languid-looking with boredom or sulkiness.' (p.34) Tee recalls the memory of her great-grandmother and of how her example under slavery was used to instil the value of the family's African heritage:

Ma said that I was her grandmother come back again. She said that her grandmother was a tall straight woman who lived to an old age and her eyes were still bright like water and her back straight like bamboo, for all the heavy load she had carried on her head all her life. The People gave her the name Euphemia or Euph-something, but when they called her that she used to toss her head like a horse and refuse to answer so they'd had to give up in the end and call her by her true-true name.[...] But Tee was growing into her grandmother again, her spirit was in me. They'd never bent down her spirit and she would come back and come back and come back. (p.19)

Beatrice, like 'The People' who failed to reinvent her great-grandmother, never calls Tee by the 'true-true name' of her Creole family, but refers to her as the anglicised 'Cynthia' while Toddan is too young to recognise himself by the name of 'Codrington'. By the end of the novel, Tee struggles to retain the image of her grandmother tossing her head 'like a horse'. Aunt Beatrice emerges not as a 'bitch', but as someone caught in the spiral which Helen Tiffin defines as 'entrapment/erasure within a European script and from those Anglo-Victorian middle-class values with which an educated Caribbean middle-class were so deeply imbued.'⁵⁷ It is a form of linguistic alienation which infects Tee with shame and demonstrates her indoctrination by Beatrice. She reaches the point

where she has so fully internalised the 'European script' that it allows her to disassociate herself from Tantie and to betray the people she loves, describing them as 'common raucous niggery people and all those coolies.' (p.86)

The point of this conflict, which Tantie loses, is that Hodge refuses to romanticise an existence which will provide Tee with limited choices for personal development. Tee is a scholarship child who devours books, and the world of Tantie and Mikey and Toddan will inevitably become too small for her. Tantie is able to provide the unconditional love which the child craves, but it is Aunt Beatrice who has the resources to effect the necessary transformation into 'Cynthia Davies'. Indeed, Herdeck has argued that it is Beatrice's 'finishing' which equips Tee to survive in Trinidadian society:

Auntie Beatrice is very important, for she slowly cleaned Tee up and transmogrified her into 'Cynthia' so that she could begin to cope with the caste system in Trinidad where shades of darkness and light are apparently still terribly important.⁵⁸

This transformation inevitably requires Tee to deal with a double-consciousness that characterises the colonised world. In the following passage, it is the adult narrator who articulates a growing realisation of this:

For doubleness, or this particular kind of doubleness, was a thing to be taken for granted. Why, the whole of life was like a piece of cloth, with a rightside and a wrongside. Just as there was a way you spoke and a way you wrote, so there was the daily existence which you led, which of course amounted only to marking time and makeshift, for there was the Proper daily round, not necessarily more agreeable, simply the valid one, the course of which encompassed things like warming yourself before a fire and having tea at four o'clock; there were the human types who were your neighbours and guardians and playmates - but you were all marginal together, for there were the beings whose validity loomed at you out of every book [...] the beings whose exemplary aspect it was that shone forth to recommend at you every commodity proposed for your daily preference, from macaroni to the Kingdom of Heaven. (p.62)

Hodge presents the processes of 'doubleness' as inextricable from the 'Trojan Horse' of global consumerism. She ultimately finds the transformation from Tee into Cynthia self-destructive - to the point of suicide: at her lowest ebb, on holiday with the obsessively controlling Beatrice, Tee fantasises: ' Suppose I were to drown down here at Canapo. Tomorrow maybe. It was the first agreeable thought I'd had for the day'. (p.91) Psychic survival is left uncertain at the end of the novel, with Tee alienated and full of self-loathing. The schizophrenia which she acquires in the course of her personal development is left unresolved in terms of her place in Trinidadian society. The resolution for the child Tee, which is uncomfortable, is sought through exile to England rather than through rejection of the role assigned to her. Hodge has stated that she had no intention of idealising Trinidadian society, or of the roles circumscribing women which were an inseparable part of wider social injustices. Later, she would maintain that fiction written by women would be bound to expose the inequalities:

I am, of course, very interested in the redressing of imbalances, both in the projection of women in Caribbean fiction and in the participation of women in the creation of Caribbean fiction.⁵⁹

This comment was made in the late 1980s, when Hodge still had only one novel to her credit, but there had been a blossoming of other Caribbean women's writing, some of which had developed the themes which *Crick Crack, Monkey* initiated.

At the time of its publication, this first novel by an unknown West Indian woman author attracted the attention of the mainstream literary press. *Crick Crack, Monkey* was set for success in that it was (not surprisingly) more widely reviewed than *The Hills of Hebron*, and this may have been partly attributable to Athill's influence with the media. However, I suggest that the quality of the attention was counter-productive to a serious appraisal of a potentially new and exciting literary arrival, since the reviews did little to attract a British readership. While Michael Feld's review for *London Magazine* reads like a small

advertisement, he only devotes a paragraph to *Crick Crack, Monkey* in a review which contains much more detailed and serious appraisal of three other texts. Feld begins: 'It is a great relief after these last two to find a genial West Indian novel by Merle Hodge', but his attention fails to acknowledge the nuances in the text or Hodge's use of irony as a means of setting up contradictions. He continues 'Crick Crack, Monkey has a pleasant tang', so that the only two critical judgements he offers, the 'pleasant tang' and 'geniality', suggest nothing of the legacy of colonialism and of the child's cultural alienation that the novel seeks to expose.⁶⁰ That the critic could suggest that it was 'pleasant', in fact raises the question of whether he had actually read it: if he had, then his critical engagement must have been minimal for the review fails to consider the work seriously as a new form of fiction with more than surface appeal. Consequently, whilst Feld's review appears to be complimentary, it communicates nothing of the dark undercurrents of the work, not least the unpleasantness of the circumstances which almost produce a child-suicide.

A second review suggests how Hodge's novel was read against a predetermined agenda which would attempt to place it in the genre of British working-class fiction. Clive Jordan transposes *Crick Crack, Monkey* into the context of British class-consciousness: 'The earthy, folksy characters in this presumably part-autobiographical account of growing up might be hard to take in an English working-class setting, but here they have overwhelming charm.'⁶¹ Jordan's patronising statement also manages to suggest native charm rather than any serious connection with the social and historical conditions which produced the 'folksy' characters. In another review for *The Listener*, Stuart Hood deals with the novel amongst his other quite unconnected literary choices, where the disparity between two very different worlds, those of *Crick Crack, Monkey* and *Arfur* by Nik Cohn, is easily overcome by the sentence: '*Arfur* is also about childhood'.⁶² Indeed, none of the reviewers attempt to find new ways of approaching the material, and are uncritical and oblivious to Hodge's critique of the Europeanised nuclear family, although the following observation, in an essay

of 1977 brings out Hodge's concern with the theme of the nuclear family and its destructive relationship to Caribbean ways of life:

For a lot of families are 'stable' - stable to the point where the individuals who compromise it are slowly and painfully destroyed. This is the family which stubbornly preserves a semblance of hanging together for the sake of respectability, or, as they are more likely to phrase it, 'for the sake of the children'.⁶³

But in Hood's review, his reading of these social relations is superficial: 'Merle Hodge is a Trinidadian whose first novel explores the complicated disorderly structure of her native island' - which raises the questions: 'complicated' to whom and 'disorderly' compared to what? Hood ends his brief review by celebrating the availability of an option to leave Trinidad for somewhere more 'orderly': 'Here is a world in which exile is a mark of distinction', presumably leaving Trinidad to Tantie and those too economically disadvantaged to escape.⁶⁴ Whereas Wynter's apprenticeship novel was criticised for being too long, too complicated and too ambitious, Hodge's first novel was damned for being lightweight: 'The novel's range is deliberately limited by its cosy warmth but there are hints that other, more serious things may also be within Merle Hodge's grasp', where the critic misses the 'more serious things' in *Crick Crack, Monkey* itself.⁶⁵ The only review which devoted itself entirely to the novel, and which consisted of more than one paragraph carried the weight of the literary establishment, and this is the one by the anonymous critic of the *Times Literary Supplement* which begins by being insultingly dismissive:

Crick Crack, Monkey is a little like one of those watched-for bit-parts , played by some acquaintance, in a television play - blink and you've missed it. [...] It is not the book's brevity that leaves this lightweight impression so much as the inconsequentiality of what goes on.⁶⁶

On the whole, then, the reviewers failed to engage with the work, so that the novel fell into obscurity and Hodge abandoned writing novels for the reasons that

were presented in chapter 3: like Wynter, she needed to return to the Caribbean and support herself and her children. In an 1986 interview, in which Hodge reflects almost exclusively on the successes of her cultural activism, Walmsley finally asked her about writing *Crick Crack, Monkey*. She replies 'Yes, you know, that's the end of that!'⁶⁷ However, she did finish *For the Life of Laetitia*, a second work on the same theme of cultural schizophrenia and child-suicide, the significance of which appears to have been missed yet again on its publication in 1993. *For The Life of Laetitia* was conceived as fiction for adults but it was designated a children's book on the basis that its protagonist is a twelve-year-old. Hodge was mystified when it was marketed and classified by the American publisher as 'children's fiction', for while that categorisation would render the work commercially viable it would devalue her status as a novelist. There are more serious considerations here: in a *New York Times Book Review*, Elizabeth Cohen is clearly disturbed by its designation, and issues a response that must have been very frustrating for the author:

Near the end of Ms Hodge's taut, lyrical novel Lacey hears from classmates that Anjanees has committed suicide by drinking poison. Lacey returns to her father's house, where she breaks down completely. The plot elements ring true but bring up serious questions about the very boundaries of children's literature. In many ways this novel is as much an adult novel as Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John* but the decision has been made to print it in a larger type and suggest it for ages 12 and up.⁶⁸

If *For The Life of Laetitia* was sidelined into the realms of children's fiction, Hodge's status as a Caribbean novelist has been maintained through the occasional critical and scholarly attention which *Crick Crack, Monkey* receives. However, it might just as easily have been one of the lost texts of this thesis. Hodge tells how the text went out of print after its initial publication by Deutsch in 1970, and that it was Marjorie Thorpe, teaching at a London university in the 1980s, who insisted on its been placed on the syllabus, thus stimulating the need for a reprint.⁶⁹ The latter reprint coincided with a more general drive toward

recuperative scholarship on Caribbean women writers, and Thorpe's intervention brought the text back into view at the moment at which it would be more fully valued.

4.4 Locked in the Tower: The Lost Text of *Hurricane Wake*

Crick Crack, Monkey and *The Hills of Hebron* are (sometimes) acknowledged as rare cases in a period that advances the apparent paucity of significant Caribbean novels by women writers. This study has attempted to understand on what basis their work has been included in literary histories (concerned with the novel) which have largely written out other women novelists. The Jamaican novel of Rosalind Ashe provides the third case for comparison, and, as far as my research has been able ascertain, her work does not appear in any bibliography or critical discussions on Caribbean writers. However, the text itself would suggest that it should be. *Hurricane Wake* magnifies a different set of West Indian social relations to those depicted in the previous two novels, in that Ashe's text deals with the tensions between African-Caribbean house servants, a poor white German, and their white master and mistress. As a means of defending the argument that this unknown work should qualify for fuller critical attention, a brief description of the plot and some interpretation of the possible meanings to be gleaned from novel are presented below.

The opening paragraph from *Hurricane Wake* will serve to illustrate its language and its gothic style:

Last night I woke and heard that sound again, and lay listening. I knew it was only a swooping bat - for if not, then it must be the fearsome sabre practice of a samurai warrior so skilled he can shave the hairs off a blanket with curving, winnowing strokes, mincing every quarter of the unlit room.

I lay there at attention, trying to remember fear.

But the graceful samurai was wishful thinking, just another fantasy rooted in the silt of my imprisonment. Do I desire fear? I can see that all my life slopes up to and away from the night of the hurricane. I was alive then, and perhaps only then: love and fear are bound inseparably in my mind.⁷⁰

The plot of *Hurricane Wake* is revealed through a first person-narrative of the terrible events which occur over the twelve hours of 'Hurricane Rita'. Ashe begins the novel with the above prologue, narrated at some time after the hurricane, and from the point of view of the female protagonist, Elizabeth. She, we learn, is imprisoned in a tower and the symbolism of her incarceration is immediately established. The plot progresses by gradually revealing the circumstances that have led to her imprisonment. We register that the actual violence of the hurricane will mirror the psychological and physical destruction of its victims. Fear, associated with the power of the hurricane, brings the diverse company of Elizabeth's house into unusually close and disastrous proximity. Each chapter represents the passing of an hour, beginning at six o'clock on the first day and ending with the departure of the hurricane at five o'clock on the next. Elizabeth's description of the household's frenzied attempts to survive the hurricane is designed to reveal her relationship with her twin brother, Tom, and the extent of his mental instability. Her predicament begins in a conflict with him over the strict social boundaries that he insists upon between the occupants of the house. Tom is totally inadequate as a leader, but his obsession with subordination prevents the more able employee, the German Headman Maurice, from taking charge and preventing much of the destruction. Tom repeatedly punishes Elizabeth for showing affection to Maurice and for establishing solidarity with the other servants. The need to shelter from the hurricane brings everyone in dangerously close proximity to Tom and his madness. The usual components of the figurative colonial 'Great House' house are present: Tom and Elizabeth are joined by their 'poor white' Headman Maurice, Nan (the obeah woman) and a company of black servants. As the house is literally blown to bits, the veneer of civilisation breaks down, the force of the hurricane invoking the dark forces of obeah, and survival is sought through its power. In opposition to the magic of obeah and the madness of Tom, it would appear that the only rational presence is Elizabeth's. But as the hurricane's power increases, and the upper floors of the

house become too dangerous to inhabit, the family descends into the cellar. At this point in the narrative, Elizabeth's rationality disappears and we learn that she has had a deep fear of this space since early childhood - the implication being that, for her, it represents a descent into hell. Immediately prior to the hurricane, we are told that Elizabeth has returned from a trip to England where she has fallen in love with an English cousin, Edward, on whose rather unlikely appearance she pins her all her hopes for survival. However, Edward flies down from Miami in his small plane, somehow circumventing the hurricane, and attempts a rescue. But having arrived against all the natural and supernatural odds to free Elizabeth from the dark cellar, Edward is shot by Tom. In a highly surreal scene, the injured Edward manages to walk out into the hurricane, and Elizabeth describes him as disappearing into the air. Tom also murders Elizabeth's other romantic possibility, Maurice, who represents a type of manliness that she values: kind, strong, and earthy and able to declare his love for her. But as the narrative moves backwards and forwards between Elizabeth's childhood, the hurricane and her present imprisonment, we come to understand that Tom's life-long obsession with controlling her ensures that by the end of the novel, all her protectors will have been removed. Elizabeth has replaced her mad aunt Cissie in the restored turret and is periodically straightjacketed by Nan, on Tom's orders. She is imprisoned and treated as a mad woman, whilst the insane Tom remains in absolute power over her and the rest of the estate.

There are obvious similarities between the voice of the imprisoned Elizabeth and that of the mad Creole, Antoinette Cosway, in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. *Hurricane Wake*, in other words, would find a place in that genre of West Indian women's writing which is familiar to a reader of Rhys's novel, *The Orchid House* and *Luminous Isle*. Ashe's gothic tale also has some relationship with other writing by white Creole women, in that it presents a text which, as Evelyn O'Callaghan describes it, is 'inconvenient to the neat binary pigeonholing of imperialism.'⁷¹ White women's despair at the brutality of the imperial project was reflected in their writing as far back as the early nineteenth century, and O'Callaghan's

reading of such narratives written by white women presents an overwhelming theme of the West Indies as a 'place of disease and death.'⁷² It is clear that Ashe's novel reveals a world which has degenerated even further into madness and destruction, the dehumanising policy of slavery having evolved a white society which is psychologically damaged and morally bankrupt. Ramchand noted strikingly similar features in writing by white West Indian women, which he attributed 'not to the authors' knowledge of one another, but involuntarily from the natural stance of the White West Indian.'⁷³ As part of this 'White West Indian' sub-genre, *Hurricane Wake* appears to share all of Ramchand's defining features. We can identify them from the following list which he presents as 'elements of continuity' in white West Indian fiction:

[The] attitudes of the White characters to landscape and to the other side represented by the Negro masses; the functional presence of long-serving Negro nurses, and of obeah-women; the occurrence of dreams, nightmares and other heightened states of consciousness; and references to an outer socio-economic situation that is recognisable as the fall of the planter class.⁷⁴

As we have heard, Elizabeth is imprisoned in the turret of her family home in Westmoreland in Jamaica, the crumbling 'Great House' representative of one of Ramchand's 'continuities' - that of a visibly decaying 'planter class'. Elizabeth observes on her return from England that '[t]here was no escaping the sad alteration in the house and yard, the neglect and seediness.' (p.24) The themes of madness, incarceration and incest also provide links with other writing by West Indian women, and O'Callaghan and others have traced the recurrent image of the madwoman in such literature. These texts often concern the development 'of female characters [who] manifest a form of psychosis in their near-total flight from "reality" and end up incarcerated or institutionalised.' O'Callaghan asserts that 'the voice of the madwoman - the ultimate outsider' is the consequence of 'her inability to find a place in [...] society.'⁷⁵ Elizabeth's family, like Antoinette's in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, have a history of mental illness: her mother was sent to

England following a nervous breakdown, and the previous occupant of the turret was her aunt who, it is held, went mad following the death of her father and brother. However, Ashe's text provides an interesting spin on this theme of female madness, since it concerns itself as much with Tom's schizophrenic behaviour: indeed, whether Elizabeth experiences love, pain or fear is dependent on his extreme mood-swings. As an example, when the storm warning arrives, Elizabeth finds Tom's behaviour quite bizarre when contrasted with the servants' desperate preparations. Disaster most certainly looms, but Elizabeth is disturbed to find Tom engaged in one of his favourite games of needless destruction:

As I reached the mounting block where a flight of steps leads up to the verandah, two quick shots blasted out above me, raising a crowd of screaming birds from the hillside and an outraged peacock, poised self-consciously on the sundial, gave a piecing wail, overbalanced and flopped heavily down the wall, into the undergrowth. Tom stood by the railings holding his precious pistols, and as I looked - because I looked - he blew on the barrels, Western-style, to cool them. It was a gesture from our youth, a nod to the past, but I found it disturbing. It was not quite a joke: he was too much in the part. (p.23)

It is Tom who engages in a 'flight from "reality"', withdrawing into a sadistic fantasy, in which by killing the peacock, Tom gains pleasure from Elizabeth's observation of his play-acting and cruelty.

There is also textual evidence which would support a reading of Tom as a sexual abuser of Elizabeth, and if so, their incest would not be an isolated instance in West Indian literature. Ramchand's work on white West Indians alludes to hints of incestuous relationships in *The Orchid House* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*: 'To the sense of withdrawal we must add sexual inbreeding (a feature of enclave life) which appears fleetingly in *Wide Sargasso Sea*'.⁷⁶ Indeed, it is the result of generations of inbreeding that prompts Nan to warn Elizabeth not to regard her cousin Edward as a potential sexual partner. But Ashe also implies a sexual element in the twins' close physical relationship resulting from their secluded and lonely childhood. Elizabeth recalls how, as a child, she was

smitten by Tom's beauty and tells how she 'adored' him. In the turret, when she suggests that Tom might benefit financially from her death, his response is chilling:

'I can wait' he said. 'You're quite pretty, you keep me amused.[...] We'll have to see what we can do about Aunt Cissie's fortune: I'll need it if I am to put up a show and marry well. I must admit it will be hard to find the right heiress: you've set such a high standard in looks and good company - but when you've gone quite white, when you're unattractively thin and bad-tempered-' I caught his hand as he chuckled me under the chin, and bit it hard; and he went away to tend it. (p.10)

Further evidence may be found in the following admission of guilt and complicity by Elizabeth:

My brother does his creating, of course, by conception; he must have plenty of little creations dependent on him by now. No wonder he needs my money.

God wouldn't let *me* conceive. He must be a just God, to disallow the monster I would produce. In my way, I thank him; and for my sins, He condemns me to this sterile life-preserving penance. (p.9)

At the age of eighteen, it seems unlikely that Elizabeth would have such an unequivocal knowledge of her infertility without the experience of a long-standing sexual relationship that had failed to result in pregnancy. The guilt associated with an incestuous relationship perhaps provides the key to interpreting Elizabeth's imprisonment: in the turret, she is safely and exclusively retained for Tom's sexual pleasure until such time as he finds her unattractive - her madness providing an acceptable reason for her incarceration as far as the rest of the household is concerned. Her isolation is also a means of preventing her from exposing him. Although none of this is explicitly articulated, one of the most important aspects of *Hurricane Wake* is its suggestion of incest and sexual abuse at time when such topics were taboo. The sublimation of this particular sexual taboo will re-emerge later in the discussion of Lucille Iremonger's autobiography.

In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Rhys wished to 're-vision' the story of the mad Creole woman - by giving her a voice and a past - which Brontë had employed as a gothic device in *Jane Eyre*. We should not ignore the possibility that Ashe chose to return to a theme in *Hurricane Wake* which is strongly reminiscent of one used by Edgar Allan Poe in 'The Fall of the House of Usher', and with which there are numerous intertextual features. Both sets of twins are orphaned, having lost parents at a young age, leaving responsibility for the house and the lineage to unstable progeny. Both texts concern the offspring of a dysfunctional and genetically impaired family. The house, in each case, contains a malevolent spiritual force which must be destroyed by nature: both houses are eventually demolished by a whirlwind. The medieval tropes for incarceration - the turret in *Hurricane Wake* and 'the donjon' in 'The Fall of the House of Usher' - both contain a (live) twin sister. There is an obvious play on doubling and opposition provided by the twin characters. As 'split' personalities which make up different sides of the same coin, Tom and Elizabeth have widely different qualities: in contradiction to Tom, Elizabeth states: 'I don't like violence. I have a horror of death', and yet they are 'the photo-and-negative doubles' of each other. (p.11) Likewise, Roderick and Lady Madeline bear a 'striking similitude'⁷⁷. Both texts hint at the results of inbreeding, and claustrophobic, incestuous relationships in which both Lady Madeline and Elizabeth are unable to conceive and any descendants will result from the other sexual liaisons of their brothers.

Several writers, by the mid-twentieth century, had depicted descendants of the plantocracy as doomed (like the Ushers). *Hurricane Wake* is both an imaginative response to their decay and relates to a larger concern with female subjugation. Gloria Naylor's novel *Linden Hills*, for example, is an African-American's reworking of this theme of degeneracy, in which entombment is applied to a series of 'Mrs Nedeeds' who are imprisoned in Mr Nedeed's cellar. As Margaret Homans' reading of *Linden Hills* would suggest, such extreme depictions of entrapment and cruelty to women - in fiction written by women - actually works to revenge their negation.⁷⁸ In this respect, Elizabeth, in Ashe's novel, has few

means to resist the patrilineage which places Tom in absolute power over her, except her attempt to record the events of the hurricane in her journal:

I crawled in and hid under my four-poster bed a few mornings ago, to alarm him when he came for his usual visit; and while I was waiting in the dust and the dark, I discovered a loose board, with a little space beneath it. I swept the droppings to one side and hid it there - my Manuscript. (p.7)

This passage depicts the woman Elizabeth as a vulnerable and abused child, crawling into the smallest physical space to seek a womb-like protection provided by the dust and the dark, but her manuscript is her revenge (she hopes to persuade someone to deliver it to the outside world), and her metaphorical form of release from her incarceration. She writes to escape the monotony of her imprisonment and to record the negated 'truth' of Tom's abuse of her: she has no real hiding place and her only sanctuary is provided by the secret writing of the diary. Beginning her story from this state of imprisonment, Elizabeth attempts to retain her sanity in the organisation of a narrative: 'Twelve hours of siege, twelve hours of fear and love and jealousy. Murderous hours.' (p.8) It is important to Elizabeth that she carefully orders events to reveal the circumstances which lead to her living death in the fourteen-foot turret:

First I must try to unravel the separate strands and tell my story clearly. I feel awkward and stilted; but it is such a relief to set down my thoughts instead of having them loose in my head, lying like live wires sparking uselessly and dangerously. I must be strict: twelve hours of storm, described in sequence. Twelve parts, carefully labelled: it must be well ordered. (p.8)

Within Ashe's mythic construction, Elizabeth is both the Princess in the tower and the mad woman in the attic, with the voices of both.

My discovery of *Hurricane Wake* was incident on its being listed in an out-of-date 'Checklist' for Caribbean Writing issued by the Commonwealth Literature Library.⁷⁹ I have been unable to trace any other reference to the novel, and Rosalind Ashe, therefore, qualifies as one of the 'lost' writers of this study.

However, *Hurricane Wake* was not her first novel; in 1976, she had already published *Moths*, which, in a scathing review by P.D. James, was judged to be flawed by its implausibility.⁸⁰ *Moths* was categorised as a 'ghost story' in James's review, but it would be difficult to apply any European genre category to *Hurricane Wake* which was published a year later. Ashe's second novel thus resists a place in the usual popular genres for women, which may have contributed to its being ignored by reviewers and it was never reprinted. In our later mission to recuperate Caribbean women's writing, we may only speculate on whether this text was deliberately overlooked or whether it simply lay undiscovered. The themes of the work indicate that *Hurricane Wake* could be placed within the category that Ramchand develops from Fanon, of the 'Terrified Consciousness' of Rhys, Allfrey and Bliss.⁸¹ But if it has been deliberately excluded in the recuperation project, this may be because it is part of a body of literature which reveals the moral decay, disintegration and disease that afflicted the colonisers, and in the 1970s, the afflictions of the colonisers were unlikely to be of primary concern to the post-colonised. Evelyn O'Callaghan explains that, in the course of the literary recuperation project which accompanied political and cultural independence, such work was 'waved aside' as 'dominated by the oppressive influence of imperial language and culture, and [it] is therefore implicated in the colonising project.'⁸² Nevertheless, she argues against the operation of an exclusivity that would seek to deny the value of writing from such a perspective:

... to specify racial, or political, or indeed class, criteria for 'belonging' to West Indian literature, inevitably leads to more and more prescriptive injunctions about who is 'in' and who is 'out'. [...] I want to argue for a theoretical stance that permits the inclusion of the 'outsider's voice' in any account of West Indian fiction by women. What we *make* of their articulations depends on a wide variety of factors.⁸³

Ashe's text represents an anomalous female voice: the 'outsider's voice' in twentieth-century Caribbean society, in which her protagonist is literally and metaphorically incarcerated in a state, in O'Callaghan's phrase, of 'having

privilege without power.¹⁸⁴ In 1972, Ramchand had already argued for white West Indians' inclusion in *The West Indian Novel and its Background*. *Hurricane Wake* should now be reclaimed as an addition to that corpus.

- ¹ Sylvia Wynter, 'The Necessary Background', in *Critics on Caribbean Literature*, ed. by Edward Baugh (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1978), pp. 19-23 (p. 20).
- ² Edward Brathwaite, 'West Indian Prose Fiction in the Sixties: A Survey', *Caribbean Quarterley*, 16.4 (1970), 5-17 (p. 5).
- ³ This comment is reported in *Caribbean Writers: A Bio-Bibliographical-Critical Encyclopedia*, ed. by Donald Herdeck and Margaret Herdeck (Washington: Three Continents Press, 1979), p. 21.
- ⁴ Evelyn O'Callaghan, *Woman Version: Theoretical Approaches to West Indian Fiction by Women* (London: Macmillan, 1993), p. 1.
- ⁵ Kenneth Ramchand stressed that Selvon, in his use of Creole, was able to effect a synthesis between literature and orality because of his knowledge and skill with both. Ramchand argues that the fusion modifies both the use of Creole and standard English. Unpublished paper presented at 'A Brighter Sun; a celebration of the life and work of Sam Selvon', 24 June, 1994, Royal Festival Hall, London. Jamaica Kincaid also spoke of the relationship of her writing career to colonial models: 'My writing is about the relationship between the island [Antigua] and the Mother Country [...] It was better for me to have read Charlotte Brontë than Maya Angelou because Charlotte Brontë is a better writer.' Public Interview with Kincaid by Daryl Pinckney at Cheltenham Literary Festival, 15 October, 1996.
- ⁶ Kincaid cites Walcott's 'A Far Cry from Africa' in 'From Antigua to America', in *Frontiers of Caribbean Literature in English*, ed. by Frank Birbalsingh (London: Macmillan, 1996), pp. 138-151 (p. 148).
- ⁷ Janice Shinebourne stated that she had not read a Caribbean novel until 1965. In Susheila Nasta, 'Writers in Conversation: Interviews with Beryl Gilroy and Janice Shinebourne,' (Video recording, London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1986).
- ⁸ Video recording cited above.
- ⁹ This comment was made during a telephone discussion with Dr Gilroy, 22 February 1996.
- ¹⁰ Carole Boyce Davies, *Out of the KUMBLA* (Trenton, New Jersey: Africa World Press, 1990), p. xvii.
- ¹¹ Matthew Arnold, 'Sweetness and Light', in *The Portable Victorian Reader*, ed. by Gordon Haight (London: Penguin, 1972), p. 204. This essay was first published in *Culture and Anarchy*, 1869.
- ¹² Kenneth Ramchand, *The West Indian Novel and its Background* (London: Faber and Faber, 1970), p. 284-286.

- ¹³ Lucille L. Reid, *Love in the Sun* (Croyden: Gibson Press, 1975), p. 46. I am indebted to Dr Jeremy Poynting for the loan of this otherwise unavailable novel. I am also indebted to him for his comments and suggestions on a draft of the thesis.
- ¹⁴ Clara Rosa De Lima, *Not Bad, Just a Little Mad* (Ilfracombe: Arthur Stockwell, 1975), back cover.
- ¹⁵ Joyce Johnson, 'Finding a Literary Medium: Jean D' Costa's Novels for Children', *Wasafiri*, 5 (1985), 12-15 (p. 12).
- ¹⁶ ICA Video recording.
- ¹⁷ C.L.R. James, 'The Caribbean Mixture' in *The Times Literary Supplement*, 28 September 1962, p. 766.
- ¹⁸ Published interview with George Lamming, Barbados, 1993. In 'Bon(d) Voyage' by Cecil Foster, *Quarterly Black Review of Books*, 2.1(1994), p. 6.
- ¹⁹ Paul Gilroy, "'Not a Story to Pass On': Living Memory and the Slave Sublime', in *A Practical Reader in Contemporary Literary Theory*, ed. by Peter Brooker and Peter Widdowson (London: Prentice Hall/Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1996), p. 413.
- ²⁰ Ramchand, p. 41.
- ²¹ Author's interview with Anne Walmsley and Louis James, 31.5.95, see Appendix 3.3, p. 281.
- ²² I am indebted to Dr Jeremy Poynting for drawing my attention to Carew's highly significant remarks in this interview with Daryl Dance. In *New World Adams: Conversations with Contemporary West Indian Writers*, by Daryl Cumber Dance (Leeds, Peepal Tree, 1992), p. 38.
- ²³ See author's interview with Anne Walmsley and Louis James, p. 281.
- ²⁴ Selwyn Cudjoe, ed., *Caribbean Women Writers: Essays from the First International Conference* (Wellesley: Calaloux, 1990), p. 42.
- ²⁵ Elleke Boehmer, 'Stories of Women and Mothers: Gender and Nationalism in the early Fiction of Flora Nwapa', in *Motherlands: Black Women's Writing from Africa, the Caribbean and South Asia*, ed. by, Susheila Nasta (London: The Women's Press, 1991) pp. 3 -23 (p. 10).
- ²⁶ Interview with Sylvia Wynter by Daryl Cumber Dance in *New World Adams: Conversations with Contemporary West Indian Writers*, p. 281.
- ²⁷ Dance, p. 276.
- ²⁸ Dance, p. 280.
- ²⁹ Dance, p. 277.

- ³⁰ Dance, p. 277.
- ³¹ Michael Reckford, 'Sylvia Wynter' in *Encyclopedia of Post-Colonial Literatures in English in 2 volumes* ed. by Eugene Benson and L.W. Conolly, (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 1671.
- ³² Dance, p. 280.
- ³³ 'Loss of a Prophet', *The Times Literary Supplement*, September 28, 1962, p. 765.
- ³⁴ 'Loss of a Prophet', p. 765.
- ³⁵ 'Loss of a Prophet', p. 765.
- ³⁶ Andrew Salkey, *A Quality of Violence*, 2nd edn (London: New Beacon, 1978; first published Hutchinson, 1959), p. 207.
- ³⁷ Sylvia Wynter, *The Hills of Hebron* (London: Longman, 1984), p.10. All further references are to this edition and appear as page numbers in the text.
- ³⁸ Edward Kamau Brathwaite, 'West Indian Prose Fiction in the Sixties: A Survey', *Caribbean Quarterley*, 16.4 (1970), 5-17 (p. 5).
- ³⁹ Brathwaite, p. 8.
- ⁴⁰ See Janice Lee Liddell, 'The Narrow Enclosure of Motherdom/Martyrdom: A Study of Gatha Randall Barton in Sylvia Wynter's *The Hills of Hebron*', in *Out of the KUMBLA*, by Carole Boyce Davies and Elaine Fido Savory (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1990), pp. 321-330.
- ⁴¹ Wynter refers to the incident in the novel in which Miss Gatha defies Moses by concealing an apron; she states: 'I am proud of that. I look at it and say, "But I did that - that was good." I am not proud of much else.' Dance, p. 280.
- ⁴² Dance, p. 278.
- ⁴³ It is interesting to note that Wynter felt she might have continued writing novels had she stayed in London. See Dance, p.280.
- ⁴⁴ Dance, p. 279.
- ⁴⁵ *The Hills of Hebron* is not placed in Baugh's survey of novels nor mentioned in *A Reader's Guide to West Indian and Black British Literature*, ed. by David Dabydeen and Nana Wilson-Tagoe (London: Hansib, 1988).
- ⁴⁶ Cudjoe, p. 41.
- ⁴⁷ Merle Hodge, 'Challenges of the Struggle for Sovereignty: Changing the World versus Writing Stories', in Cudjoe, pp. 202-208 (p. 202).
- ⁴⁸ Letter to the author from Diana Athill, July 25, 1995.
- ⁴⁹ Walmsley's interview transcript with Diana Athill, 9.7.87.

- ⁵⁰ Walmsley's interview transcript with Merle Hodge, 29.7.86.
- ⁵¹ See *The Caribbean Artists Movement*, p. 236.
- ⁵² Cudjoe, p. 43
- ⁵³ Herdeck, p. 21.
- ⁵⁴ Ena V. Thomas, 'Crick Crack, Monkey: A Picaresque Perspective', in Cudjoe, pp. 209-214 (p. 214).
- ⁵⁵ Merle Hodge, *Crick Crack, Monkey* (London: Heinemann, 1981), p.95. All further references are to this edition and appear as page numbers in the text.
- ⁵⁶ See O'Callaghan's interview with Erna Brodber, in *Woman Version*, p. 71.
- ⁵⁷ Helen Tiffin, 'Cold Hearts and (Foreign) Tongues', *Callaloo*, 16. 3 (1993), 909-921 (p. 912).
- ⁵⁸ Herdeck, p. 98.
- ⁵⁹ Cudjoe, p. 208.
- ⁶⁰ Michael Feld, 'Feet and Hands: *The War of '39* by Douglas Hayes, *The Hand-reared Boy* by Brian Aldiss, *The Octopus* by Rudolf Wurlitzer, *Crick Crack, Monkey* by Merle Hodge', *London Magazine*, 10. 2 (1970), 100-104.
- ⁶¹ Clive Jordan, 'Icy Heroin: *Julia and the Bazooka* by Anna Kavan. *The Process* by Brion Gysin. *The Stones of Le Thoronet* by Fernand Pouillon. *Elise or The Real Life* by Claire Etcherelli. *Crick Crack, Monkey* by Merle Hodge', *New Statesman*, 6 March 1970, p. 334.
- ⁶² Stuart Hood, 'Members of Society: *The Ghost of Henry James*. By David Plante, *Elise, or the Real Life*. By Claire Etcherelli. *Crick Crack, Monkey*. By Merle Hodge. *Arfur*. By Nik Cohn. *Slaughterhouse Five*. By Kurt Vonnegut.', *The Listener*, 19 March, 1970.
- ⁶³ Merle Hodge, 'Young Women and the Development of Stable Family Life in the Caribbean', *Savacou*, 13 (1977), 39-45 (p. 39).
- ⁶⁴ Jordan, *New Statesman*, p. 334.
- ⁶⁵ Jordan, *New Statesman*, p. 334.
- ⁶⁶ "'Village Vignettes". Merle Hodge: *Crick Crack, Monkey*.' *Times Literary Supplement*, 9 April, 1970, p. 391.
- ⁶⁷ Walmsley's transcript with Hodge.
- ⁶⁸ Elizabeth Cohen, 'For the Life of *Laetitia* by Merle Hodge', *New York Times Book Review*, 9 May, 1993, p. 24.
- ⁶⁹ Author's discussion with Merle Hodge, 27.4.96.

- ⁷⁰ Rosalind Ashe, *Hurricane Wake* (London: Hutchinson, 1977), p.7. All further references are to this edition and appear as page numbers in the text.
- ⁷¹ O'Callaghan, p. 22.
- ⁷² O'Callaghan, p. 23.
- ⁷³ Ramchand, Kenneth, *The West Indian Novel and its Background*, rev. edn (London: Faber, 1985; first published 1970), p.224.
- ⁷⁴ Ramchand, rev.edn, p. 224.
- ⁷⁵ O'Callaghan, pp. 37-38.
- ⁷⁶ Ramchand, rev.edn, p. 226.
- ⁷⁷ Edgar Allan Poe, 'The Fall of the House of Usher' in *Tales of Mystery and Imagination*, rev.edn (London: Everyman, 1993; first published *Graham's Magazine*, 1839), p. 149.
- ⁷⁸ I oversimplify here the sophisticated argument that is developed by Margaret Homans in 'The Woman in the Cave: Recent Feminist Fictions and the Classical Underworld', *Contemporary Literature*, 29.3 (1988), 299-401.
- ⁷⁹ Commonwealth Institute Library Services, *Caribbean Writing: A Checklist, No.4* (Commonwealth Institute Library, Kensington High Street, London, 1986), p. 20.
- ⁸⁰ Ashe's first novel, *Moths* (London: Hutchinson, 1976) was reviewed by P.D.James in 'Constant Nympho', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 18 June 1976, p. 730. She published further novels, *Take Over* (London: Fontana, 1982) and *Dark Runner* (London: Sphere, 1984).
- ⁸¹ Ramchand, first edn, p. 223.
- ⁸² O'Callaghan, p. 20.
- ⁸³ O'Callaghan, p. 21.
- ⁸⁴ O'Callaghan, p. 34.

CHAPTER 5

POETRY IN TRANSACTION: WOMEN'S POETRY, SONGS AND RECIPES IN THE LITERARY AND ORAL TRADITION

5.1 The Literary and the Oral Tradition

I think we have missed out a whole set of women poets, whether they didn't write or they didn't publish...¹

In the 1950s and '60s, the era that produced the Nobel-prize-winning poet Derek Walcott, women poets found it extremely difficult to publish and be recognised. The recovery of their work, and some attempt to understand the conditions that influenced their development, will reveal an important facet of the hidden history of Caribbean women's literary expression. However, we should understand that all Caribbean poets wrote in the face of difficulties associated with their colonisation. In 1970, Figueroa summarised the historical position of the young Caribbean poets thus:

We may ask further: why do many of our poets lose their voices young? Perhaps the fact that up to ten years ago most West Indian writers had the opportunity of meeting a wide variety of West Indian verse *only in London* (at the BBC) points to one of the reasons. Our community has not, until recently, acknowledged that the writing of novels and poetry might be a normal and honourable way of earning a living; and even when it started to allow that a writer need not necessarily be either a foreign celebrity or a local madman, it has not found a way of enabling him to make a living by writing. Fame has been won abroad by our writers so (this is the way many of us argue, at least unconsciously) they can't be quite as odd as we thought!²

Figueroa issued what constitutes an apology for the paucity of Caribbean poets in his introduction to the second volume of selections from the BBC's *Caribbean Voices*.

In doing so, he accounted for an historical legacy which he suggested worked against all Caribbean poets: the notion of writing poetry as 'odd'; the lack of opportunity to meet with other poets, except in the atmosphere created by the BBC's *Caribbean Voices* as described in Chapter 2; writing seen as an activity which only gained validity through the approval of the 'discerning' people in the metropolis; the compounded voicelessness and lack of tradition which surrounded home-grown poets; the lack of any financial recompense for writers; and the absence of a tradition of creative writing as a viable means of earning a living.

It is clear from Figueroa's explanation that his definition of poetry, as metropolitan, scribal and publishable, was narrower than that which has developed since. In the early 1960s, when Figueroa compiled his selection from *Caribbean Voices*, he primarily defines poetry within the inherited confines of a European literary standard: that is, that poetry is highly wrought, written in a standardised English lexicon, and placed within the tradition of metrically patterned 'verse': although, by volume two of the *Caribbean Voices* anthologies, he does issue a challenge to this European standard by including the work of Louise Bennett. Bennett's art, which is now recognised as ground-breaking within the development of a Caribbean literary tradition, was for many years ignored by the literati. Her work was broadcast by the BBC and on Caribbean Radio, but was dismissed as a popular comic form of entertainment which had no relationship to poetry published in standard English. We have now come to value poetry from the Caribbean for its very hybridity, arising from a unique blend of European, African, Asian, South American and Amerindian linguistic and cultural influences. Diverse examples of poetry from the Caribbean are, therefore, not now defined as being either high or low culture, as if arising from a European literary tradition or from a vernacular one. As Paula Burnett points out: 'that very cross fertilisation may make it increasingly difficult in the future to divide poetry in such a manner.'³

In the 1960s and '70s, the divisions were intact but beginning to yield, and, in practice, the work of Barbara Ferland demonstrates how Caribbean poets are inevitably strongly influenced by both traditions. The rationale for inclusion in the present section is less concerned with whether the work can be placed in a literary or an oral tradition, but that it has been written down and published in some form. The highly-polished, but neglected, work by women poets who contributed to *Caribbean Voices* and *Savacou* is, of course, represented, but it is equally important to recognise the value of the published work of beginner poets and Federation writers, who were not only accomplished lyricists, songsters and storytellers, but were the important repositories of much that has gone unrecorded. Community published work should also be recognised as important because, as this chapter will argue, it was produced within a unique context provided by the politicised workshops of the Federation. Such groups existed to counter prevailing ideologies of class, gender and race denial that would most often silence the West Indian women writers who encountered many obstacles in the process of acquiring a written form of expression. Federation anthologies existed to 'fight for self-recognition and freedom from the gender-trap', a statement which nevertheless reveals itself as an aspect of the tokenism operating in so many of the early mainstream Caribbean collections.⁴ As the interview with Nick Pollard (reproduced in Appendix 3) explains, Federation groups published their anthologies democratically, with no regard for commercial considerations or for received notions of what constituted 'poetry'. Consequently, some of the written forms are often difficult to categorise as poetry from the perspective of a European tradition, but they nevertheless constitute an important impetus toward written expression by Caribbean members of a community of writers.

This chapter begins with John Figueroa and a more conventional approach to anthologising, one that is determined by an editor or compiler of recognised knowledge and sensitivity. Figueroa's selections for his anthologies in 1966 and 1972 featured a number of women contributors to the BBC's *Caribbean Voices* programme. These included Daisy Myrie, Gloria Escoffery, Stella Mead,

Constance Hollar, Barbara Ferland, Vivette Hendriks, Louise Bennett, Una Marson, Mary Lockett and Dorothy Phillips. Contemporaries of Walcott, V.S. Naipaul and Lamming, they write out of the same artistic dichotomy. A colonial literary tradition, with its imposed linguistic and aesthetic roots elsewhere, provides the 'gift' of language which may also be the curse of Caribbean poets torn between Europe and their own denied culture. With the notable exception of Bennett, who began writing within a literary tradition but rejected it to adopt a Jamaican vernacular form, their poetry is marked by its obvious 'literariness' and technical accomplishment. Of the women contributors, Escoffery, Ferland, Marson and Bennett are now recognised for their poetry. The award-winning poet, Gloria Escoffery, still writes and publishes poetry but has, in the main, devoted her life to teaching and painting in the Caribbean.⁵ Barbara Ferland's work also attracted an award, which as Peter Orr states, is some indication that it contains rather more than just an 'impressive display of sheer technical ability'.⁶ In order to provide an example of one of these promising young women contributors - of how they came to write and contribute poetry, and of the type of poetry they submitted and of their subsequent development - I interviewed Ferland, and will present some of her work and her thoughts on that work below. Ferland has lived in England since 1960 and might have been expected to have developed her writing career under the benign literary influence of the Caribbean expatriate community in the metropolis. This did not prove to be the case, and in contrast with so many of her male contemporaries, Ferland's published work appears to have ceased on her arrival in Britain.

Ferland's background is not untypical of the women contributors to *Caribbean Voices*. She was born in 1919 in Spanish Town to Jamaican-born parents. Her father was an Edinburgh graduate who specialised as a doctor in tropical diseases. The conditions which encouraged her to contribute to *Caribbean Voices* were outlined in Chapter 2, in an attempt to place her development within the context of the effects of writers' networks and patrons. Our discussion revealed the importance of Archie Lindo, Jamaican representative

for the BBC, who happened to be passing through her office whilst she was writing a poem.⁷ Ferland was typical of the many well-qualified and highly intelligent women who were to be found working as secretaries in publishing, broadcasting, or some branch of the arts at that time. When Lindo observed that Ferland appeared to be writing something - he asked to see it and immediately discerned a remarkable quality in Ferland's 'scribblings'.⁸ An anthology of her work, published in 1994 and entitled *Without Shoes I Must Run*, includes 'The Stenographer' and depicts the scene that must have faced Lindo in the early 1950s. The poem voices a rebellion against the dull secretarial routine and describes a moment of inspiration provided by the view from her window of the Jamaican Blue Mountains:

The simplicity of a rounded, pendant sorrow
Enhances the view from her window of the hills.
She sits on narrow upright thighs, declaiming
Her high-church assignation, though perhaps it kills
The unstained green glass of the hills.

Her fingertips caress the black face of her master
Automatically. The hedge of margin bars
Her undictated thoughts, should they go straying
Unpunctuated. No error mars the white page
of her mind. No asterisks. No stars.⁹

'The Stenographer' is typical of Ferland's work, in that its effect relies on the use of an overarching metaphor. The metaphor of the typewriter as 'the master' and the unmarred 'white page' produces the 'undictated thoughts' of the artist. Ferland juxtaposes the 'automatic' response of the typist's fingers with the rebellious 'should they go straying', to suggest the opposing forces of conformity and rebellion. She was well aware of the adverse effect of her typing job on her ability to write poetry, describing typing as the work of an automaton which means that '...physically you are very tired. But there is so much left in one'.¹⁰ In 'Seamstress', Ferland returns to the theme of women trapped within the constructs

of femininity, before such constructs were theorised by feminism. This poem describes part of the system which perpetuates patriarchy: traditional female labour which suppresses women's creativity:

My sparrow heart sits
On the sill of despair -
While a vestment I sew,
Embroidering the air.

The needles I strike
Into pattern
Disclose
A bird interstringing
 A rose.
 A rose.

And caged within cage
My feather closed hours
Like batteries of hens,
 Lay flowers
 flowers.¹¹

As with many of the contributors to *Caribbean Voices*, it is Ferland's very precise use of the English language which is the key to her imaginative development of a theme. The central image of a woman sewing enables her to forge connections between Caribbean labour history and women's position within it. The poem's title, and its starting-point, refers to the historically specific tradition of training young females as seamstresses (men trained as highly skilled tailors), much needed for a plantocracy removed from the fashion houses of Europe and for the handmade clothes necessary in an agrarian economy. But like the typist who rebels against the dictated thoughts of her 'master', Ferland's seamstress goes beyond the menial task of joining seams to create a rose out of the movements performed. She works with the reader's image of a songbird in a gilded cage, whilst the play on 'A Rose, A Rose' resonates with the imagery of Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, particularly 'Oh Rose, thou art sick, ' as an image of corrupted innocence and beauty. Ferland's use of the archaic word 'vestment',

as denoting the clothing of authority, places the seamstress as a servant of the state. The 'sparrow hearted' beauty in the poem becomes a metaphor for a woman, caged, owned and oppressed within patriarchy and its associated labours.

An important feature of Ferland's work is its marked musicality, and it is significant that she prefers to designate her poetry as 'jingles'. 'Seamstress' exemplifies this, achieving its musical quality through an apparent metrical simplicity of short lines of verse and the repetition of a refrain. She inherited a passion for music from her mother, especially Jamaican music, being able to learn songs by ear and she collaborated with Louise Bennett on a collection of Jamaican folk-songs. In 1949, she combined lyrics and music to write many of the songs for the first all-Jamaican pantomime, *Busha Bluebeard*. Whilst she regarded herself as deficient in the skills demanded by a sustained piece of autobiography (she was reflecting on the achievements of Rachel Manley in *Drumblair*), she acknowledged that she felt most satisfied with her achievements in the medium of song:

...if I were to write about my childhood, I don't think I would find the words that would fit in the right places. I don't know if I am capable of sustaining a long thing. But I do know at least that I have written in music a few songs that are pretty alright.¹²

Indeed, one of her songs, 'Evening-Time', is still used as the signature tune by Radio Jamaica.¹³ It is significant that Ferland, educated in the literary tradition, should feel accomplished in the vernacular tradition of writing folk-songs. In this respect, as a *Caribbean Voices* poet, she provides an early (and unlikely) example of the type of work that might be associated with a rather different group of poets and performers. However, her association with Bennett, and her musical influences, resulted in songs which place her in a tradition requiring the 'versatility to adapt and vary a particular song [...] which is so typical of both oral poets and popular musicians today.'¹⁴ Her work in the traditional poetic tradition,

and with popular Jamaican song, illustrates very well the inseparable cross-fertilisation of influences that characterises Caribbean poetry.

As explained in Chapter 2, it was Ferland's work at The British Council that brought her into contact with some of the crosscurrents and influential figures in cultural and political circles, where she was undoubtedly inspired by her contact with the many writers and artists who were in Kingston in the 1950s. She socialised with painters like Escoffery, performers like Bennett, and writers like Walcott and Vidia Naipaul, and she was part of a generation who were profoundly influenced by the political conviction of the Jamaican prime minister, Norman Manley, and the artistic inspiration provided by his wife, Edna.¹⁵ But Ferland, even though she circulated in this distinguished group, was unable, like Merle Hodge (see Chapter 4, p.114), to regard herself as 'a writer.' She explained that she kept her own efforts to write poetry a secret, and that those writers who might have encouraged her (Walcott and Naipaul) were 'so involved in their own creative work' that she felt unable to broach the subject of what she regarded as 'a bit of scribble'.¹⁶ Her self-perception did not appear to be much changed by the praise she had received from Archie Lindo or the publication of her poetry in anthologies and in literary magazines such as *Bim* and in *Focus*. However, she deemed it a great honour that Figueroa chose to read her poem, 'Le Petit Paysan', at Edna Manley's funeral and, equally, at the age of thirty-three, that she was awarded the Sir Robert Barker Prize for Lyric Poetry.

However, by the time Ferland arrived in England in 1960, *Caribbean Voices* had ended and she had changed priorities. She was no longer a secretary at the centre of a cultural and political revolution and had family responsibilities: 'I wrote a bit but I was busy being a woman and a wife.'¹⁷ She had no involvement in The Caribbean Artists Movement and she lost contact with its key figures, some of whom she had known well in Jamaica. She moved to suburbia where, like Beryl Gilroy, she became isolated, particularly from the fellowship of writers and artists whom she admired. By all accounts, in London she became an ex-poet, whilst some of her more famous contemporaries went on to publish in

Britain and become recognised. I asked Ferland if all the poetry in *Without Shoes* was written in that productive period in Jamaica:

SC So your career as a published poet was really in the Caribbean not over here. So you didn't attempt to get anything published over here. Did you send anything off? Did you try to get anything published after 1960?

BF In 60, no. Some of the other things in the little booklet are things I have written over here. But none of them were sent up.

SC So that's the first time they have been published in that collection. I see.

BF But many of them were written here.¹⁸

She continued to write, and did publish some short prose pieces in women's magazines, typically on her Jamaican childhood. But she published no poetry. Some of the poems in *Without Shoes* that were 'written here' but were unpublished at the time are easily identified, such as the tribute, 'To Dylan'. Dylan Thomas's work, with its strong Welsh lyricism and orality, inspired Ferland, and it would appear that other Caribbean writers were also moved by Thomas's language. At a time when they were trying to find a distinctly Caribbean voice of their own, his work provided a model of musicality and irreverence for English grammatical conventions. Escoffery recalled the effect of hearing him read; and Gilroy also enjoyed one of his London pub readings in the company of Selvon and Lamming. 'To Dylan', Ferland informed me, was provoked by a pilgrimage to Laugharne, where she made a point of visiting Thomas's graveside and of seeking out the local people who would remember him. The resulting poem pays tribute to the boldness of Thomas's linguistic extravagances in a style that manages to be reminiscent of his own:

Boyo, the compromise enclosed was not enough.
Roistering the pub-sprayed beaches
 between the tousled light,
You swaggered down the swaying boathouse path;
 Sullen in the bullring of your craft.

Unimpeded

by contrite verb,
What fugitive word beckoned you, censored,
Into the derogatory night? The voiced expletive,
Whirled from the manual of your tongue
has been recorded
In the hymnals of your mountains.

Boyo, the compromise redressed
is not enough.¹⁹

The following poem, 'When They Come From the Island', would also appear to have been written in England. By way of contrast to Thomas's tribute, this poem is imbued with homesickness for the sensual nature of Jamaica and a nostalgia for its vernacular culture, its stories, events, characters and the unrecorded significance of certain spaces. In the poem, Ferland captures something of the sense of loss felt by many of the post-war generation of Caribbean settlers in Britain:

When they come from the island
I say to them, talk to me of home.
They tell me
Of buildings, knee-high skyscrapers.
They speak of a North Coast, white-bleached by tourists;
Of night-clubs, hotels, of Discotheques,
And black American Cars, riding the roads with power.
They declare that Independence has created a new nation.
And they are proud of their prosperity.

But no-one will say
If the agave still blooms on Long Mountain
Or if the market women hills, swinging blue hips down
to the plain,
Still sweat their springs,
And smell of ginger lilies.

No-one has told me
Whether
In the holy caralillo season
Sun candles set poinsettias afire
Under taut skies, a Norther blowing.
They say,

You should see the new houses, the glaze-tiled
Swimming pools,
The Self-Service Plazas. And, of course,
The air-conditioned flats, Press a button, and
You're cool, man,
All the year round.

... And no one
Remembers Strawberry, Miss Kizzie, or Adinah,
Who used to walk barefooted down the fern lined paths
Into a good morning,
Their tin cans, wet-sugar lined, capturing
cold spring water,
Spendthrift of the flow.

And no one,
Not one of them, knows
What happened at Mattie's Corner.
Or why a donkey, mindful of a clay pipe smouldering,
Nozzles a shadow, awaiting her return.²⁰

Here, the market-women provide the linchpin for nostalgia - for sights, sounds and smells that Ferland was to never experience again - and the longing for them is deeply felt, conjured up by their 'smell of ginger-lilies'. Ferland is drawing on a potent symbol in her poem: for the image and cries of the market-women recur in Caribbean poetry.²¹ Such women were (and still are in the rural Caribbean) not only the vital providers of fresh food to larger towns, but were also *the* carriers of news and stories; so that in Ferland's poem, they may have been the only ones who knew the origins of such names as 'Mattie's corner'. The poem mourns the passing of unwritten stories and a certain purity and innocence associated with the sweated labour of an agrarian people whose lives, Ferland fears, are doomed by the refrigerated, air-conditioned trappings of American-style tourism.

Barbara Ferland is an example of a poet of acknowledged talent who appeared to lose her voice young although, in fact, she continued to write. She has emerged as one of the most respected women poets from the *Caribbean Voices* group, but she is only known, as a poet and songwriter, for work which was produced in Jamaica before 1960, under the encouragement of Archie Lindo.

Figueroa asserts that it was the fraternity of Caribbean expatriate in London that normalised the activity of poetry writing, and which stimulated, promoted and encouraged young writers who found fame abroad. But Ferland seems to reverse Figueroa's assertion that poetry was generated by the acceptance of Caribbeans' work in London. That may well have been true for many of her now famous male contemporaries, but Ferland lost confidence in her ability to publish poetry when she left Jamaica. However, the work she did produce in England would have been lost but for the encouragement of Figueroa and Orr, and for the subsequent publication of *Without Shoes* in 1994, which remains her only volume of poetry.

One of the pressures exerted upon women poets of the 1960s would have been an attempt to gain access to an expressive space which was defined in patriarchal ways. If a Caribbean man writing poetry was considered abnormal, then a woman writing poetry would attract yet more derision. This, no doubt, is one of the factors that encouraged women poets like Ferland to write in secret. Figueroa's gender-specific description of the poet as 'local madman' might simply be assumed to be reflecting the fact that the odds were against the 'local' poet being a woman. In actuality, many Caribbean women were writing poetry and, like Ferland, they challenged the stereotype of the Caribbean poet, which would have been assumed to be a man ('mad' or otherwise). Figueroa might have considered that the small group of women poets he included in the two volumes of *Caribbean Voices* were likely to have been regarded as even more strange than their male counterparts. Significantly, Gloria Escoffery, as one of the women poets of Ferland's generation, has chosen to work with this figure of the mad poet - as a symbol of isolation and resistance. In the following declaration from Escoffery, she claims solidarity with the 'town mads' having been, presumably, considered to be one of them:

O U R M A D S

Our abounding, astounding town mads
confound us with the hiatus of their being
Dirty Boy, Preacher Harry, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera,

are your busy silences and sidelong glances
more the product of sagacity
than the townspeople's dollars and cents babble?
Congealed in the certainty of myself,
indifferent to the fact that our town's merchants
see me as awe inspiring - but a crackpot -
I cherish my solidarity with the mads.²²

In the poem, the first-person narrator prefers to live with the tendency to be regarded as a 'crackpot' rather than conform to what she perceives as the real madness of the 'dollars and cents babble' of everyday existence. And for Escoffery, resistance is achieved through the barbed message of the poem.

There is no question that many women were writing poetry in the 1950s and '60s, although, their absence from major anthologies would seem to deny this. But they challenged erasure from a male-dominated field in their numerous contributions to small-scale Caribbean-based literary journals. As an example, the Barbadian journal *BIM* testifies to the fact that an educated stratum of women sought publication for their poetry and that they were critical in developing the new (related) forms arising from folk and oral traditions.²³ However, what is striking is this disparity between women's presence in Caribbean literary magazines and their absence from British published anthologies. Although women poets in the Caribbean clearly did get their work into print in periodicals, their contributions were often overlooked when it came to compiling new anthologies of poetry for the general market. Anne Walmsley, Genevieve Eckenstein and Beryl Gilroy were all well-qualified to issue a comment on the fact that poetry was especially male-dominated, and as Rebecca O'Rourke also put it: 'I think poetry in the sixties was an incredibly patriarchal place.... poetry was male'.²⁴ It is not surprising, then, that the late 1960s and early '70s saw the publication of much poetry by feminist presses, although this situation itself produced a paradox: women's lack of access to publication gave rise to women's presses on the one hand, but the work remained ghettoised within the small publishing ventures that sought to release it. It remained by and for women, and

was often collected together in publications with specialist and partisan interests exclusively marketed for women. The fact that work was released, but was simultaneously separated from even the mainstream feminist presses such as Virago, contributes to its absence from literary histories. Laura Marcus makes the following observation in *The Bloomsbury Guide to Women's Literature*:

The relative lateness of this move [the opening of Virago's lists to women's poetry in the mid-1980s] indicates the secondary role that poetry has played to the novel in Feminist publishing, which contrasts with the important place of poetry in the women's movement itself. Women poets' exclusion from mainstream poetry publishing and general anthologies has been very marked; to this day authoritative anthologies and critical surveys appear in which they have little more than a token presence. Much work remains to be done, then, in reconstructing and interpreting the history of 20th-century women's poetry.²⁵

A sample of 1960s and '70s Caribbean anthologies reveals unsurprising but very clear evidence of male domination of the poetic genre. The presence of work by women poets appears to be very much at the whim of male editors, who may include them as tokens of the denied experience from a group which is excluded. The occasional presence of women poets in male-edited anthologies reinforces Tillie Olsen's warning to remember 'How chancy is recognition and getting published'.²⁶ Typically, the 1971 *West Indian Poetry: an anthology for schools*, edited by Ken Ramchand and Cecil Gray, only includes contributions from Una Marson, Louise Bennett and Alma Norman. Similarly, *New Planet; an anthology of Modern Caribbean Writing*, compiled and edited by Sebastian Clarke in 1978, included the work of just one woman, Judy Prescod. But it was the CAM secretary, James Berry, who provided an example of the total exclusion of women poets in his first edition of *The Bluefoot Traveller: an anthology of West Indian poets in Britain* (1976). In conversation with Berry, he explained to me why there were no contributions by women in this important early black British anthology, asserting that writing by women 'just wasn't there'. He later said:

the ones we did get couldn't possibly go in. [I asked if all the submissions were of equally poor quality] The only one I regret not including was a poem from Beryl Gilroy. It couldn't go in. It was just one small poem. It wouldn't have done her justice and it would have looked out of place, just the one.²⁷

Ironically, given the omission of women from the first *Bluefoot* and the self-fulfilling prophesy that this was likely to produce, Anne Walmsley remembered that it was Berry, whilst secretary of CAM, who expressed an interest in promoting women's writing.²⁸ By the time the second *Bluefoot Traveller* was published in 1981, the quantity and/or quality of submissions had either improved, or Berry wished to compensate for their previous exclusion by including the work of five women poets.²⁹ But the absence of women's poetry in general anthologies, such as the first *Bluefoot*, is no indication of the amount of poetry that women were writing or submitting in the 1960s. A careful scrutiny of publication acknowledgements in a 1989 anthology edited by Mordecai and Wilson, *Her True True Name: An Anthology of Women's Writing from the Caribbean*, reveals material that was undoubtedly written years before.³⁰ Such anthologies compensated for an under-representation of women's poetry in new collections of Caribbean writing exclusively *by* women. The 1977 women's edition of *Savacou*, for example, was dedicated to the memory of Una Marson, although, significantly, it was still considered necessary for it to carry a preface by its usual editor, Edward Kamau Brathwaite. As if to validate the enterprise and to suggest the more recent social challenge which had stimulated its production, Brathwaite sets the work in the context of 'Women's Lib':

Stimulated by, though not dependent on, the Women's Lib of the younger 70s, some of the sisters associated with Yard Theatre and the Caribbean Artists Movement, got together the idea of a Caribbean Women's issue for *Savacou*.³¹

Awkwardly adopting the language of the women's movement ('the sisters'), Brathwaite goes on to pay tribute to the issue's initiators: the 'unsubmerging

mothers' (his generic term for the women) who, he explains, worked for over two years to produce it under severe financial constraints. Brathwaite designates the main figures as CAM activists, Marina (Maxwell) Omowale, Doris Brathwaite and the editor Lucille Mathurin Mair. The exclusivity of such a women's issue, with its eclectic mix of scholarly articles, short stories and poetry, was intent on giving exposure to some of the now fully 'unsubmerged' talents of the English-speaking Caribbean, including Lorna Goodison, Opal Palmer, Velma Pollard and Erna Brodber.³² Individual contributions mixed genres in a way that crossed boundaries between scholarly argument, poetry and history, as in the following extract from Myra D. Bain's 'Images', which uses the traditional Jamaican 'Linstead Market' to return again to an image of the market woman, this time as a simulacrum - minus the reality of sweat and starvation - to sell an illusory notion of the 'happy' Caribbean to tourists:

Fleshly glossed lithographs, hung in tourist offices, project expensively woven lies of a happy people. The market women are never raggedy or sweaty. Their fruit is always ripe-ripe, pretty, naturally dropping into their baskets.

In the old days, the Europeans didn't ask us what we thought of these Caribantilsugarumspice islands in the sun. Today our governments don't ask either, they just pay "them" to tell us.

CARRY ME ACKEE GO A LINSTAD MARKET,
NOT A QUATTY WUT SELL,
CARRY ME ACKEE GO A LINSTAD MARKET,
NOT A QUATTY WUT SELL

OH LAWD! NOT A MITE NOT A BITE
WAT A SATIDAY NIGHT!
LAWD! NOT A MITE NOT A BITE,
WAT A SATIDAY NIGHT.

But there are new jobs now. Very few women still work in the market. We are clerks, typists, nurses, school teachers, civil servants, tourist guides, stewardesses, beauty contest winners, etc. And expatriates. London, Manchester, Port Washington, Toronto, Montreal, Brooklyn, the Bronx, New Haven, Miami, all have Caribbean women now. Maybe the islands are

growing larger, manh. Or maybe the women are just following the men. you know how womens does love men, nuh.³³

The women contributors demonstrated a freedom from stylistic and formal convention in their edition of *Savacou*, no doubt to act as an antidote to previous rejection and denial. CAM member, Christine Craig (discussed in Chapter 2), contributed a short story to the issue, and this represents the fact that she felt able to break her silence and envisage herself as a writer. By 1977, she had then, drawn strength from the support of her fellow *Savacou* women writers, and in a poem that was published later, she used the image of 'The Chain' to articulate the continuation of women's silence and to explore the effect of breaking the chain of that silence:

I no longer care, keeping close my silence
has been a weight,
a lever pressing out of my mind.
I want it told and said and printed down
the dry gullies,
circled through the muddy pools
outside my door.
I want it sung out high by the thin-voiced elders
front rowing murky churches.
I want it known by grey faces queuing under
greyer skies in countries waking
and sleeping with sleet and fog.
I want it known by hot faces pressed against
dust streaked windows of country buses.

And you must know this now.
I, me, I am a free black woman.
My grandmothers and their mothers
knew this and kept their silence
to compost up their strength,
kept it hidden
and played the game of deference
and agreement and pliant will.

It must be known now how that silent legacy
nourished and infused such a line,

such a closed linked chain
to hold us until we could speak out
loud enough to hear ourselves
loud enough to hear ourselves
and believe our own words.³⁴

Here, Craig makes explicit a desire that the 'weight' of untold expression which lies beneath the surface of women's silence be known both by the 'grey faced' colonial descendants queuing under the 'greyer skies' of the metropolis and the 'hot faces' of the rural poor in the Caribbean. In this, she affirms that women's expression should be made public in the widest sense, not kept in secret and considered as something forbidden. Craig treats as positive that vital line of survival the foremothers have maintained as the 'silent legacy', depicting them as a source of strength and nourishment that would manage to hold all the unrecorded links - of women's history, of family, of story-telling - in place until such time as women were free to speak out. In Britain, some of these links between a vernacular culture, tradition and creative expression were in fact recorded under the direction of Federation projects, and it is in these projects that the blurring of the boundaries between song, market-cry, poetry and story-telling is most evident.

5.2 Women Poets of the FWWCP Transfer the Oral tradition into Writing

There is little doubt that a desperate sense of homesickness is the key to the release and production of much of the work by women who wrote as part of Federation groups. The practicalities of living in a foreign country stimulated the need to acquire standard English, but as part of a group, they would also find comfort in the sharing of their feelings with other Caribbeans in a similar position. Their prevailing homesickness was a theme which Louise Bennett, known as 'Miss Lou', saw fit to parody in the vernacular language of the

'ordinary' immigrant. In the following extract from her poem, 'Homesickness', she employs the double-edged satire so characteristic of the author both to acknowledge and ridicule the suffering of the Caribbean migrant:

English country road-dem pretty
And sometime when me dah roam
An me see a lickle village
Me feel jus like me deh home.

But me galang and me galang,
Me no see no donkey cart!
Me no meet up no black smaddy,
And it heaby up me heart.

For me long fi see a bankra basket
An a hamper load
A number-leven, beefy, blacky,
Hairy mango pon de road!

An me mout-top start fi water,
Me mout-corner start fi foam;
A dose a hungry buckle-hole me
Am me waan fi go back home.

Go back to me Jamaica,
To me fambly! To me wha?
Lawd-amassi, me figat -
All a me fambly over yah!³⁵

Bennett's poem uses the speech and sentiment of the homesick migrant to illustrate the West Indians' ability to laugh at themselves in the face of adversity.

But for many West Indian women in Britain, homesickness - the actual severance from loved ones, familiar objects and rituals - was a very real problem that might be eased by the company of the writers' group. The differences between British and Caribbean food and the difficulties of obtaining simple ingredients, such as long-grain rice, would often serve as a focus for their alienation.³⁶ Ironically, it was under the auspices of an 'English class', which nevertheless insisted on maintaining the authenticity of West Indian language and

expression, that *Captain Blackbeard's Beef Creole and other Caribbean Recipes* came to be published. The introduction explains: 'As far as possible we have written Captain Blackbeard as we spoke it, each recipe in the voice of its author'.³⁷ And those authors, all thirty-four women and six men, are named. The book is ostensibly a recipe collection, but it also includes stories of events attached to certain meals, poems and songs, and as such it represents a particular response to change brought about by migration and the reconstitution of rituals and identities under threat. The publication affirms the importance of knowledge and skills which would have previously been passed on as an everyday part of an oral culture. The recipes, instructions on cooking and preserving methods and on fishing techniques, may well be traced back to survival strategies developed by an enslaved society taken from Africa, and may possibly have been written down for the first time ever in order to ensure their absolute further survival by people who travelled on the 'third passage' from the Caribbean to England. It is highly significant that the group commonly shared reminiscences which were to do with food and the rituals associated with meals. It should not be underestimated how socially and historically significant such rituals are for people who become dislocated from their own culture. The recipes, and the instructions concerned with social occasions, carry with them the coded messages of a 'people without history', just as the descriptions of material artefacts, such as cooking tools and utensils, also carry historical information and provide the hitherto unrecorded links that Christine Craig described as her 'silent legacy' in 'The Chain'. As Laura Esquivel later recognised and explored creatively in *Like Water For Chocolate*, recipes, meals and the momentous events that are marked by them are deeply significant within the context of extended-family life and within the wider social history of people who are left out of 'official' literature.³⁸ Anthropologists, such as the Dominican, Lennox Honeychurch, concern themselves with the ways in which history and culture become carried in tools and everyday artefacts. A written record is unnecessary in a closely-knit community with a shared heritage and culture. In a sense, the Peckham group of Caribbean writers, removed from

that community, represent the need to find new ways of recording material that would not normally be written down: that is the rituals, processes and cooking implements that feature in *Captain Blackbeard*. Lennox Honeychurch's anthropological research in the Windward Islands has led him to pursue the following line:

... in the case of several 'invisible' sectors of Caribbean society therefore, I argue that their material culture becomes the equivalent of documentation. The ways in which particular objects become agents of cultural innovation and the manner in which their influences are linked to specific patterns of society may be explored. It raises questions as to the extent to which these effects are distributed so that the ways in which people's lifestyles and perceptions are continuously responding and reconstituting themselves all become elements in this process.³⁹

He has researched patterns in Carib Indian basketry, for example, to reveal the ways in which these ancient methods of transportation are preserved for a number of uses including as tourist souvenirs. His work suggests that the changes and adaptations of pre-Columbian methods of construction in the baskets serve as code-carrying objects which record change. The significance of these baskets which have survived profound cultural changes in the Caribbean, are explained thus:

As Guss has revealed in his work on baskets among the YeKuana, it was possible to see the entire culture refracted through a single object or deed associated with that object. The beliefs and activities surrounding the gathering and preparation of materials of the object also provide a complimentary set of information.⁴⁰

In this context, the 'handmade' qualities which are transferred in written variations in the recipes, songs, poems, instructions and stories collected in *Captain Blackbeard* record a culture which fights to survive social challenges posed by migration, tourism and global consumerism. The anthropological nature of the information given reveals aspects of life that may well have remained part

of an important but 'silent legacy'. An example here is the recipe for 'Simon's Strong Rum Punch', which is set alongside the following information on how to obtain the main ingredient:

'The Rum Factory'

I know these men
who work at the sugar cane factory
They make rum there
The men usually take rum home
by soaking their coat in the rum in the vat
when they get there in the morning.
When they are ready
to come home in the evening,
they take their coat out and put it in a plastic bag
and take it home with them.

When they get home
they wring the coat out,
and leave the rum to settle.
Then they put it in a bottle
and keep it for drink
and give their friend some.
This was the strong rum.
You can't buy it in the bar.⁴¹

We may surmise that this (illegal and dangerous) practice dates in some form from the earliest sugar plantations and their refineries. The 'trick' is the type to be passed down through the generations in absolute secret. Indeed, much of the writing - which is set out visually in the quasi-poetic format demonstrated above - is intent on giving detailed instructions to the novice on quite specialised skills - such as 'killing a Chicken', 'Salting, Smoking and Pickling' - all of which might be supposed to be redundant in urban Peckham. The following passage is typical, and suggests that what is conveyed has been of great importance in the past and is worth recording:

'How to fish with a piece of pipe'

You take a piece of pipe of any length
put it in the river -
by the bush on the side of the river
or near the rock.
Leave it over night.
Next day, you go with a friend.
Each of you put your hand
over the ends of the pipe.
Take it on shore, tip it over one side,
then the fish comes out.⁴²

Much of the *Captain Blackbeard* collection is concerned with the transmission of such survival skills, but equally important is the record of rituals and celebrations such as those depicted in 'Christmas in St Lucia':

Most of the people keep a pig
And fatten them to kill on Christmas Eve
Everywhere you pass on the morning of Christmas Eve
You will hear the crying of the poor pigs. [...]
Christmas Eve night we go to midnight mass.
When we get home
We have pig's liver
and special butter bread
we bake ourselves.⁴³

Also recorded are practices which have proved essential to people who have, through a combination of tradition and historical necessity, relied on herbal medicine. Some writers interject an 'extra' medicinal tip into the recipes, such as 'White Chocho is very good for blood pressure', while many of the contributors recognise the appropriate selection and application of herbs as a valued skill - as in the following traditional cure for colds:

'A Cure for Colds'

In the West Indies, when you get a cold,
you don't go to a doctor.
We boil our own herb medicine -
We grow up on it.
Our parents do it, so we do it the same way.

And I think that is the best.

Some people use marijuana
Boil it is the best
and if you put rum on it and drink
it's good.
But the one for smoke, no good.

If you got a chest cold
and you break it up in little bits
and put some white rum in it,
people say it is good.⁴⁴

The instruction issued above, again, suggests that the benefits of this remedy, with all its local variations, have long been matters for transmission and discussion.

People who are seldom recorded in 'official' historical documents are honoured in the names of the recipes: 'George's Pumpkin and Chocho Soup with Dumplings'; 'Vilma's Roast Chicken' and 'Eualia's Okra, Shrimps and Saltfish'. The giving of names may also be a method for distinguishing and remembering variations in the recipes, such as 'Lynneth's Fish Tea' and its alternative 'Muriel's Fish Tea'. For an oral society, such lyrical memory-aids were shorthand methods of conveying important information, as also were ring-games and work-songs. For people outside the knowledge of such a community, these are difficult to interpret, but it seems likely that they had a function which would be passed on to children in the pleasure of their repetition. The following traditional ring-game, with its accompanying song, may in fact carry an important warning about the (malaria-carrying) mosquito getting into the cooking pot:

'Muriel's Song'

When we were school children
we used to sing this song
and hold hands like a ring
and we used to be jumping
while we were singing it.

Mosquito jump in the hot callaloo
Mosquito one
Mosquito two
Mosquito jump in the hot callaloo
hot callaloo
hot callaloo⁴⁵

To be fully understood, such songs need to be studied from *within* the community that continues to carry them. Although the very existence of 'community' publications (by definition) reflects their supposed significance and validity for their immediate constituents (in this case Peckham), as they become written down to ensure their survival, their wider availability poses a problem of interpretation which needs to be addressed. In *Nice Tartin: Life and Food in the Caribbean*, a much later example of a similar project to *Captain Blackbeard*, songs are recorded that must have survived through countless generations. For example:

'Song From Tobago'

Me mama gone,
Me papa come in,
We go cook rice an' peas to eat,
We go cook rice an' peas an pile up some,
And wait till me mama come.⁴⁶

The significance of the song is not explained, leaving the reader to guess at a 'meaning' (in which the 'mama' appears to be the absent but most important character). The survival of this fragment may suggest a story which we cannot know, but which may be supposed goes back to the days of slavery when children were often left without one or both of their parents. Such songs can only signal the existence of that secret legacy that Craig honoured in her poem, 'The Chain' in which she paid tribute to the grandmothers and their mothers who 'knew this and kept their silence'.

To understand the 'secret' significance of the Tobagan song we will need to access both the knowledge it carries and the conditions which maintain its continuation. That will only be possible through the circulation and discussion of such songs through publication. The songs that are cited above are hidden away in little-valued community publications, but other examples are to be found in mainstream collections of Caribbean poetry. Paula Burnett's *Penguin Book of Caribbean Verse in English* devotes a large section to oral forms in a way that emphasises the importance of such diverse cultural products as traditional songs and calypsos and their relationship to a developing literary tradition. We must attend to the record of preliterate societies who employed the folk-song as the carrier of news and comment with topical variations that were extemporised with great skill. As part of an oral tradition which was, as Burnett reminds us, 'typified by the sung word long before it adapted itself to spoken poetry', they continue in the performance and commentary of contemporary poets.⁴⁷ The Tobagan example, which tells its story through song, is part of a tradition which has produced the more recent and popular successes of, for example, Linton Kwesi Johnson. The sophisticated performance poetry of Johnson is an exemplary hybrid, mixing music and poetry. Of course, it is the modern technology of compact discs which commodifies Johnson's work for an international market but which also ensures that the historical events which he interprets are recorded for posterity. Modern performance poetry of the 1970s was topical, blending patois with standard English to depict race riots, police oppression and institutional racism in work such as his 'anti-sus' law poem, 'Sonny's Lettah'.⁴⁸

However, it would be misleading to end this chapter with an impression that the work produced by Federation women poets was essentially to do with recipes and reminiscence, and that their writing existed solely to combat homesickness and to record traditional Caribbean rituals and practices. It is clear from much of their work that Caribbean women poets also joined the Federation because they were highly politicised and their writing spoke to the conditions that inspired Johnson. A much less well-known 'anti-sus' poem was published in a 1987

anthology, *Not All Roses*, although its theme would place it in the 1970s.⁴⁹

'Watch It!', by a Federation woman poet Thandiwe Benjamin, relates the 'sus' law to a history of migration in the context of its various stages: of the failed assimilation of the 1960s and the disassociation and resistance of the '70s. In so doing, it anticipates the reactions which would provoke the riots of the '80s:

'YOU BETTER WATCH IT'.
We build up de street
And we clean up de street,
A drive a bus in de street
But you won't leave us in peace.
Now we a go a rioting in de street.
Me seh fe watch it
Black people a go mash it.
When blood a running
Know that we're not funnin'.
No bother hide cos
We a go get you
You better watch it!⁵⁰

Benjamin's work is a barometer of the changed consciousness of a second-generation of Caribbeans who would have no experience of the agrarian lifestyle recorded in *Captain Blackbeard*. However, both types of poetry - the reminiscence work and the politicised commentary - were made possible because of important shifts: by the late 1970s, events in Britain which had stimulated the formation of the Federation were to provide a unique set of conditions for women poets whose work had never 'fitted' European models and whose opportunities for expression had been hitherto confined to the private domain.

- ¹ Velma Pollard cited in *New World Adams: Conversations with Contemporary West Indian Writers* by Daryl Cumber Dance (Leeds: Peepal Tree, 1992), p. 174.
- ² John Figueroa, *Caribbean Voices Volume 2: The Blue Horizons* (London: Evans Brothers, 1970), p. 14.
- ³ Paula Burnett, ed., *The Penguin Book of Caribbean Verse in English* (London: Penguin, 1986), p. xxi.
- ⁴ Black Anthology Group, 'Introduction', in *Not All Roses, Poetry and Prose* (London: Centreprise, 1987), p. 5.
- ⁵ See Gloria Escoffery, *Mother Jackson Murders the Moon* (Leeds: Peepal Tree, 1998), p. 27.
- ⁶ Peter Orr, 'Introduction' *Without Shoes I Must Run* by Barbara Ferland (Leeds: Peepal Tree, 1994).
- ⁷ Ferland worked, from 1948 to 1960, as a secretary to the music officer at The British Council in Kingston. See Appendix 3 for the full transcript of our interview.
- ⁸ Her poetic role models were, of course, not Jamaican. She tells how her terse and honed style was influenced by Rupert Brooke, Emily Dickinson and Edna St Vincent Millay. See author's interview with Barbara Ferland, Gerrards Cross, 12.2.97, appendix 3.5, p. 349.
- ⁹ Ferland, p. 31.
- ¹⁰ Author's interview, transcript p. 371.
- ¹¹ Ferland, p. 34.
- ¹² Author's interview, transcript p. 368.
- ¹³ Ferland related the story of how 'Evening Time' became very popular, and that she passed it on to someone who subsequently arranged for its use as the signature tune for Radio Jamaica. See transcript p. 354.
- ¹⁴ Burnett, p. xxxiii.
- ¹⁵ Author's interview transcript p. 367.
- ¹⁶ Author's interview transcript p. 353.
- ¹⁷ Author's interview transcript p. 355.
- ¹⁸ Author's interview transcript p. 356.
- ¹⁹ Ferland, p. 13.
- ²⁰ Ferland, pp. 26-27.

- ²¹ The role of the market women - as a symbol of spontaneity, creativity and community - is iterated in performance by Amyrl Johnson in 'Granny in de Market Place' and in a similar version, by Valerie Bloom. Published variations include: Daisy Myrie, 'Marketwomen', in *Caribbean Voices Volume 1: Dreams and Visions*, ed. by John Figueroa (London: Evans Brothers, 1966), p. 10; 'Linstead Market' in the 1977 edition of *Savacou* (p.15); 'The Market Woman Complains' in *Nice Tassin: Life and Food in the Caribbean*, ed. by Liz Bartlett (London: Kensington and Chelsea Community History Group, 1991), p. 26.
- ²² Poem sent to the author by Gloria Escoffery, July, 1997. There is a longer version of 'Our Mads' which has since been published in *Mother Jackson Murders the Moon*, p. 27.
- ²³ For specific references to women's poetry in Caribbean literary journals such as *BIM* and other regional publications, see Barbara Commissiong and Marjorie Thorpe, 'A Selected Bibliography of Women Writers in the Eastern Caribbean,' *World Literature Written in English*, 17.1 (1978), 279-304.
- ²⁴ Author's interview with Rebecca O'Rourke, Middlesborough, 17.7.95. Transcript, p. 9.
- ²⁵ Claire Buck, ed., *Bloomsbury Guide to Women's Literature* (London: Bloomsbury, 1992), p. 31.
- ²⁶ Tillie Olsen, *Silences* (London: Virago, 1980), p. 41.
- ²⁷ Author's conversation with James Berry at the tribute to Sam Selvon, 'A Brighter Sun', at The Royal Festival Hall, London, 24 June, 1998.
- ²⁸ It is minuted that Berry initiated the following: 'Proposed Topic for future CAM meeting: Caribbean women writers: How do they see their society? A review with Louise Bennett, Merle Hodge, Paule Marshall and Marina Maxwell.' (Item 14. Note from meeting of CAM, 27 June, 1971).
- ²⁹ In *News For Babylon: West Indian-British Poetry* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1984), Berry includes the work of Accabre Huntley and Valerie Bloom.
- ³⁰ Pamela Mordecai and Betty Wilson, eds. *Her True True Name: An Anthology of Women's Writing from The Caribbean* (London: Heinemann, 1989). See also *Ain't I A Woman! Poems by Black and White Women* collected by Illona Linthwaite (London: Virago, 1987).
- ³¹ Edward Kamau Brathwaite, 'Preface', in *Savacou*, 13 (1977), vi.
- ³² Brathwaite also explains that the women's edition was intended to be a double issue but that financial constraints had prevented such a large publication. He indicates that a second volume was planned to include work by Brodber and Pollard, and others who do not feature in volume 13. It is not

clear if this second volume was intended to follow on as volume 14, but such a volume of women's work was not produced. The next volume of *Savacou* did not appear until 1979 and was entitled, 'New Poets from Jamaica', an anthology edited by Brathwaite. See Walmsley's *Savacou* Appendix, *The Caribbean Artists Movement*, p. 328.

- ³³ Myrna. D. Bain, 'Images', *Savacou*, 13 (1977), 14-15.
- ³⁴ Christine Craig's, 'The Chain', from *Quadrille For Tigers* (London: Mina Press, 1984), is cited in *Daughters of Africa*, ed. by Margaret Busby (London: Vintage, 1993), p. 555.
- ³⁵ Stewart Brown and Ian McDonald, eds., *The Heinemann Book of Caribbean Poetry* (London: Heinemann, 1992), pp. 11-12.
- ³⁶ First-wave migrants from the Caribbean tell how they were forced to use a type of pudding rice in their recipes. This would transform one of their staple recipes, rice and peas, into a mush.
- ³⁷ Written and collected by a group of Caribbean writers attending a 'Peckham Bookplace' English class, *Captain Blackbeard's Beef Creole and other Caribbean Recipes* (London: Peckham Publishing Project, 1981), pp. 64-65. The introduction states that the writing originates from work in 1979.
- ³⁸ Laura Esquivel, *Like Water For Chocolate: A Novel in Monthly Instalments with Recipes, Romances and Home Remedies* (London: Black Swan, 1993).
- ³⁹ Lennox Honeychurch, 'Reading Material Culture as the documents of "People Without History"'. Unpublished paper from the Society for Caribbean Studies Annual Conference, July 1997.
- ⁴⁰ Honeychurch, unpublished paper.
- ⁴¹ *Captain Blackbeard*, pp. 64-65.
- ⁴² *Captain Blackbeard*, p. 52.
- ⁴³ *Captain Blackbeard*, p. 55. The Christmas pig-fattening and killing is reminiscent of a similar practice described by Flora Thompson in *Lark Rise to Candleford*, the collection of stories which describe the village life of her childhood at the turn of the century. I had previously noted a similarity between some of the practices described in *Lark Rise to Candleford* with those depicted by Beryl Gilroy's in her Guyanese reminiscences, *Sunlight on Sweet Water* (Leeds: Peepal Tree, 1994). We discussed the fact that her own Afro-Guyanese village maintained similar rituals to those depicted by Thompson, including the circulation of the 'baby-box', containing clothes and other items, which was passed on to the next woman in the village who was about to give birth. See Flora Thompson, *Lark Rise to Candleford*, rev.edn (London: Penguin, 1995)

- ⁴⁴ *Captain Blackbeard*, p. 67. This might be better understood in the light of more recent medical research on the use of marijuana as a pain-reliever.
- ⁴⁵ *Captain Blackbeard*, p. 9.
- ⁴⁶ Geneva Thomas, 'Song From Tobago', in *Nice Tartin': Life and Food in the Caribbean* by Liz Bartlett, ed. (London: Kensington and Chelsea Community History Group, 1991), p. 44.
- ⁴⁷ Burnett, p. xxix.
- ⁴⁸ Linton Kwesi Johnson, *Tings and Times* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe, 1991), p. 25 - 27. Many of the poems in this collection were originally published in *Race Today* in the 1970s.
- ⁴⁹ 'According to a report published in 1978, 44% of the "sus" arrests in London in 1977 were black youths; but black youths made up only 2.8% of the total population', in 'Racism and the Law', *Racism in the Workplace and Community* (Milton Keynes: The Open University, 1984), p. 3.
- ⁵⁰ Thandiwe Benjamin, 'Watch it', in *Not All Roses: Poetry and Prose* by the Black Anthology Group (London: Centreprise, 1987), p. 49.

CHAPTER 6

AUTOBIOGRAPHY: OUT OF THE SHADOWS

6.1 West Indian Women Writing in the Tradition of Autobiography

But sometimes, you know, lots of shadows are cast across the landscape.¹

This chapter concerns West Indian women writers who published autobiographies in Britain in the 1960s and '70s, and the diverse examples of work presented below range in length from a single paragraph of writing to full-length autobiographies. None of the women featured in this chapter came to Britain with aspirations towards becoming a full-time writer, as Lamming, Selvon and Naipaul had done. It would have been virtually unimaginable for a woman to think in terms of a full-time career as a writer at that time.² For Joyce Gladwell, Beryl Gilroy, Lucille Iremonger and the other writers cited here, their decision to write an autobiography had much less to do with personal ambition than that their autobiographies emerged from denial and misrepresentation. For West Indian women writers surfacing from a long and voided history, the connection to the use of this literary form is historical, since the first two published works by West Indian women were autobiographies. The texts that follow display something of the spirit and prowess of *The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave, Related by Herself*, which was published in London in 1831, and *The Wonderful Adventures of Mrs Seacole in Many Lands*, published in 1857, testimonies which effectively weakened a regime which relied for its success on collective dehumanisation.³ In particular, a public challenge leading towards abolition was issued by the singular, and very human, voice of Mary Prince. Her autobiography bridged that geographical and imaginative gap between a reader in Britain and the daily practices of slavery, and in the quest for abolition, such an intensely personal testimony was able to achieve more than

political rhetoric alone. This chapter explores rare examples of twentieth-century West Indian women's autobiographies, written a hundred years after Prince's and Seacole's. They, too, were politically apposite - generated by a need to liberate the post-war generation of West Indian women from a dehumanising legacy of imperial stereotyping and from patriarchy.

These women writers employed the form of the autobiography to reveal a deeply personal experience that would otherwise be absent from the historical record. The motivation for writing an autobiography, as opposed to a novel, differs, although both forms demand an equivalent level of literary skill. One explanation repeatedly offered for the paucity of novels by Caribbean women is the assumption that women lacked the material means, the space, the time and/or the skill, to engage in the demands presented by such a sustained piece of writing. The examples that follow challenge this particular explanation for Caribbean women writers' occlusion, since it may be argued that autobiographies require an equally sustained commitment and involve similar creative decisions and formulations. Novels provide the imaginative scope to play out fantasies - what Freud identified as the distinct ability of the creative writer to use their writing as a form of wish-fulfilment or day-dreaming.⁴ An autobiography is no less fictive in that it will inevitably employ an element of recasting and wish-fulfilment in its construction. Indeed, this literary opportunity to re-play a past may supply the prime motivation for its production. But if autobiographies are creative in their use of the past, then they do so under different terms. Novel-writing enables the writer to place themselves behind the protective shield of fiction and novelists are often inclined to disassociate the material from their own problematic life-histories. Autobiographies must own up to the record of experience, and premise that record on a shared expectation that it is based on the 'truth' and is not a fantasy. Indeed, it is the owning and naming of the experience that provides the critical difference between novels and autobiographies. But while the strength of an autobiography lies in the writer's ability to represent a unique experience which lays no claim to generality or historical authenticity, it

is the revelation of a uniquely individual perspective which may contribute to a recasting of the 'official' versions of history. But autobiographies are, of course, the written testimonies of a fallible and wilful memory which must be reconstructed using the conventional narrative strategies of characterisation, temporality, suspense and point-of-view and such acts of selection may distort experience. While their individual distortions are unimportant in terms of their literary value (at least no more so than those built into fiction), taken as historical evidence, their selectivity must be confronted by reading the testimonies against other contemporary discourses such as historical sources, fiction, life-histories and official records. For example, a comparative reading of Louise Shore's *Pure Running* with Jean Rhys's short story 'Let Them Call it Jazz' reveals similar responses to a situation, based on real-life events, which may allow us to surmise that their writing represents a more generalised experience. Aside from being born in different parts of the Caribbean, the writers are worlds apart in terms of their class and social status and this is what makes their common choice of subject-matter interesting.

The writing and publication of the following examples of autobiography are acts of bravery and self-determination. An autobiographer must sustain a level of self-esteem which insists that *this* experience of *this* individual is important enough to go on the public record. In respect of West Indian women writers in the 1960s, this may appear in itself, contradictory since the writers cited below suffered from determined attempts to undermine their feelings of self-worth. As previously noted, some of the women writers in this study (Hodge, Ferland, Craig) claim that a lack of self-esteem, an inability to perceive themselves as 'writers', has at times prevented them from advancing their career through a greater quantity of published work. Even a measure of success, and the changed climate for women's writing, does not obviate the long-term effects of a poor self-image created in childhood. Indeed, Gladwell testifies to a lasting effect resulting from her submission to the moral tyranny of her upbringing: 'My self-esteem was damaged. I suffer still.'¹⁵ Nevertheless, she reclaims her damaged

self-esteem through the act of writing. Autobiographies by West Indian women in this period are, therefore, supreme acts of defiance (and revenge) which reclaim, and remake, a damaged identity.

Usually, autobiographies are the province of the famous or the notorious, of those it is deemed have extraordinary lives or have extraordinary talents, but the women whose autobiographies follow were not recognised or particularly famous, although arguably they were talented. Their autobiographies record the otherwise unknown material details of everyday life, and describe in fine detail a type of experience which, to my knowledge, is otherwise undocumented. The autobiographies were selected on three counts: that their depiction of experience is necessarily unique and fascinating; that their structure and style is distinctive enough to invite further critical attention; and that these publications were destined to be written out of the literary history of Caribbean writing. I have attempted where possible to set this writing in the context of its production and reception, and to analyse the factors which have contributed to its occlusion. The only example currently in print is the 1976 publication, *Black Teacher*, and that is attributable to its reclamation by Bogle-L'Ouverture in 1994. There are strong arguments to support the case for the reissue of the Gladwell and Iremonger texts.

Overall, the chapter gives an account of the diverse experience of different classes of West Indian women and the writing of their life-stories. The first section begins with the written work of 'ordinary' working-class women writers who joined Federation groups and cites their determined attempts to acquire the skills to write about their experiences. In contrast, of the full-length autobiographies which follow, all of the women were being groomed for a professional life. The two examples by Gilroy and Gladwell depict, amongst other things, the traumatic effects of the authors' encounter with British racism. As Morgan Dalphinis states in his introduction to the reissued *Black Teacher*: 'all the signs are that the initial issues raised in Gilroy's book remain extremely relevant to our present society' - in other words, that racism is not an historical

phenomenon which is finished.⁶ The final author is included by way of further contrast. The white Jamaican, Lucille Iremonger, describes a different type of oppression: privileged, and unaffected by the 'colour bar', she too was being groomed for her anticipated role in society. But Iremonger reveals the disjuncture between her social conditioning and that of the other writers in Chapter 6 in an autobiography which details the personal costs involved in shoring up the crumbling façade of white supremacy.

6.2 'Child You Come at a Bad Time': Working-Class Autobiography and Reminiscence Writing

It was then that I saw my father. He was different, I thought, than I saw him in 1968. He had lost weight, a lot of weight. He was with a man and a woman. The man was a stranger but the woman I recognised from photographs my grandmother had; she was my uncle's wife. They came forward to greet me and the first words my father spoke to me were, 'Child, you come at a bad time.' He's been saying that ever since.⁷

Thirteen-year-old Carmen Vernon had never even visited Kingston when she was called upon to travel alone on a plane journey which took her from rural Jamaica, via New York, to join her family in England. She records her father's first words on arrival in a collection of essays in which other migrant writers also describe their experience of coming to Britain. These examples form part of an important, but neglected, sub-genre of autobiographical writing generated out of the particular environment created by the Federation groups as discussed in Chapter 2. There follows a discussion of this body of work by Caribbean women writers, the majority of which is very little known about or attended to. The discussion focuses on examples which have been community, rather than commercially, published and were printed for circulation within Federation groups and their local communities. I include an explanation of the unique social and psychological conditions which stimulated their production, and follow this with an exploration of what constitutes work in the category of 'working-class

autobiography and reminiscence writing'. In this section, the material covered has been published up to the mid-1980s, slightly longer than the period defined for the thesis as a whole. But the extension of the period is in recognition of the long gestation involved in the transformation of writing into publication. For example, a text discussed below - Louise Shore's *Pure Running* - was typical in that it took several years to develop. The work originated in 1977, but the final version, first published in 1982, was the end-product of a complex editorial process involving the arrangement of Shore's pieces of writing and extracts from taped conversations.⁸

These examples of working-class writing are included primarily as evidence to refute the claim, cited by Jeremy Poynting and others during interviews,⁹ that 'ordinary' Caribbean women from a predominantly vernacular culture would have had few opportunities and no impulse to document their experiences in written form.¹⁰ The wealth of material from Federation adult literacy and community writers' groups indicates how the will towards written expression finds an outlet against some exceptional odds. The motivation for that need may well have been fuelled by the profound experience of separation - in many cases, the first physical separation - from close communities in the Caribbean. In the 1950s and '60s, letters were the only practicable means of communication with loved ones abroad. Some of the younger migrants may not have been the letter-writers at home, but on arrival in Britain they may have needed to join a literacy group to acquire the necessary skills.

There is a stigma attached to a lack of schooling in the Caribbean which appears to have become more acutely felt on arrival in Britain and was compounded, no doubt, by other forms of discrimination. Many writers speak of the shame of being considered illiterate, and of the ways in which this labelling affected their daily lives. Many writers also speak with a justifiable bitterness at their lack of educational opportunities. The following extract lays bare the all too common circumstances - of too many mouths to feed and too little food - which resulted in children missing school. Below, 'Roslyn' explains the circumstances in

which she came to be sent away from her family and the resulting neglect of her education:

When I was a child in Jamaica I did not grow up with my mother and father. Them gave me away to a pair of people, Mr and Mistress Whitely, and them did not send me to school. Them have me from I was about four years old and all I did was work. One day I looked and see the children was coming from school and I ask the woman I was with why I am not going to school. She tell me that she is not my mother so I tell her that I wanted to go home to my mother and I started to cry.

Going Home

About three weeks after, one morning she said that she is sending me home. At that time I was twelve years old and straight as I go to my mother she was so shocked to know that I was not going to school till she started to cry and she send me to school now. But that time I was so big and old that I did not want to go. I was so ashamed that I did not want to stay in school now. Anyway I go for a little time and through that, I did not get to learn the way I should. When I leave school I could not read and write the way I would like.¹¹

In the same collection, 'Cloeta' also describes a form of child-exploitation which precludes attending school. By the time she was rescued from her labours, and was able to attend school, it was far too late to catch up:

My name is Cloeta.

I was born in Jamaica and my mother was very poor so I grow up with a step-mother. She treat me very bad. She did not send me to school. Most of the time she learn me to do gardening and most of the time to fetch water. Some times I go to school just one day of the week. It just one Saturday I go to the market and there was a lady said to me "Who is your father?" and I told her, so she said she will tell my mother for me, and in two weeks time my mother came for me and take me home.

Shame to go back

I was twelve years old when my mother took me back to school and I was so shame to go back just in A class, so I did not go back. But when I grow up I realise about my future. My future was so bad, was so sad.¹²

In a poignantly forthright extract, the writer below explains how lack of school fees and single-parenthood contributed to the withdrawal of a child from school. Survival in these circumstances places education on a list of luxuries that the family can no longer afford:

My father died when I was just ten years old.
I only went to school for a month.
I went to church in the morning first
and after that I went to school.

But my mum could not send us to school
because there were six of us.
I was the oldest one.
I had to look after the others.

My mum had to go to work.
I did the cooking, the washing, the ironing,
the cleaning and the shopping.
When I saw my friend who used to go to school
I used to cry,
because I wanted to go.¹³

It was not just the lack of opportunities for schooling which prevented many poorer Caribbean children from acquiring basic literacy skills: rather it was the nature of the schooling itself which did little to accommodate the life of the child. For these children, learning became a fearful process associated with heavy use of the cane. Pauline Wiltshire remembers the Victorian atmosphere of her school:

Most of the schools, like my school, were of one big room with all the classes side by side with each other, all crowded together. The teachers were very strict, and so were the parents. If there was homework it had to be done properly at home. Every second we had to do something, or else. The Headmaster used to harden his cane every night by soaking it. He used it so often we used to call him 'teacher hog'. We used to hide his cane and break it but he got another one quick.¹⁴

Fear of the cane was extreme enough to warrant truancy, as the writer below testifies:

Now in the morning we must be on time for school. The teacher who is the headmaster stood on the doorstep looking out and if he saw one child running towards the door, he would call that child. You could tell just what he was calling you for. The first thing that came to your mind was 'Oh, that cane again!' Some children say, 'Not for me today. I don't like that cane.' And away they ran. Sometimes when the teacher called a child he did not go back because he would get the cane and never again would they get that child back to school.¹⁵

The teachers above employed the same punitive educational methods as the 'cruel flagellating lot' that Lucille Iremonger describes (in 6.5) as being responsible for her father's damaged personality. But of course, as a boarder, Lucille's father would have had few of the opportunities for the habitual truancy that led to so many poorer children's illiteracy. No doubt it was the need to escape the cruelty of this system which did so little to compensate for the children's circumstantial lack of achievement, that led to so many needing to attend adult literacy schemes in Britain.¹⁶

But the work cited below goes beyond the need merely to acquire utilitarian communication skills such as letter-writing and form-filling, since the impulse to write is connected to feelings of indignation (see Beryl Gilroy's explanation on page 194) and is evidence of a need for the release of creative expression and documentation of a more public kind. We might consider why so many working-class writers speak of an overriding desire to write their life-stories, even though such an aspiration may have been considered as quite 'above their station' back home. In the Caribbean, at least the traditional means of cultural expression (such as the extended family's story-telling) were available, but in Britain, Caribbeans may have become cut off from these forms. Here, I cite three examples of Caribbean women, all of whom suffered from the effects of being labelled as possessing minimal education, and their explicit desire to write their

life-story. The first is by a Jamaican, Louise Shore: speaking to her literacy tutors about her arrival in England in the 1960s, she says:

'Yes, I remember saying that my ambition was to write a book. If I had a proper education, you know. I wanted to do that actually from when I was home... About my life and things that happen to me. But sometimes I felt that I don't have the courage to do it, because the things that people might think or people might say, I scared that.'¹⁷

Pauline Wiltshire arrived from Jamaica with a passport which labelled her as 'retarded'. She presented herself at Centreprise in 1979 with a manuscript that she had already dictated to a friend, and which 'another friend then typed'. Here one of the tutors recalls her ambition:

One of the tutors there wanted all the students to write something about their lives. The first piece Pauline wrote was very short, but it gave her the idea of writing her autobiography. She had been feeling very depressed at the time, and thinking she couldn't cope. She had started to drink and was thinking of taking her life. When I first met Pauline and asked her why she wanted her writing published she said she wanted to prove that she was not a fool, and that she could lead a normal life.¹⁸

Suicidal feelings, despair and alcohol-abuse are the types of psycho-pathogenic responses that have been associated with many better-known writers (Rhys is a notable example), and the act of writing may be one means of combating those destructive impulses. At her lowest ebb, Wiltshire intuitively turned to writing even though it was bound to be an especially difficult challenge. Nevertheless, a seventy-page autobiography, *Living and Winning*, was eventually published by Centreprise in 1985. The text carries a quotation on its back cover which makes explicit the motivation which drove Wiltshire to overcome all obstacles:

On my passport I came here with it said 'retarded'. It makes me have to joke about it. How can a retarded person live on their own and write about their life? My new passport say 'disabled'. [...]
That don't make me a fool.
I wish people would see that.¹⁹

The arduous process of acquiring the skills, confidence and practical assistance to write and publish that life-story is far from completed for some Caribbean women. Federation executive member, Dorothy Blake, arrived from Jamaica in 1961 and was prevented by a series of insurmountable difficulties from continuing with the night classes that she had begun to attend in Kingston in the 1950s. She is an example of a writer who was overwhelmed by the problems of settlement and financial survival. Nevertheless, the same impulse to write a life-story was evident and, significantly, did not dissipate over some thirty years. In my interview in 1997, Blake, now able to attend Gatehouse (in Manchester) on a regular basis, also stated: 'I want to write three things: an autobiography of my life time; a collection of pieces about Jamaica and a story.'²⁰ In this instinct toward recording her very particular (excluded) life-experience, Blake does not differ from the highly educated writers in the sections which follow - in all cases their need to write was fuelled by subjugation and denial - but Federation autobiographies were often produced in the context of material and emotional deprivation of a much more insistent kind. Regardless of the status of writing generated within the environment of working-class groups, we cannot deny the agency that 'life' writing affords to the disenfranchised subject of migration. All the autobiographical material so far presented is evidence of the impulse to write as a means of reclaiming an alternative self to the one that society has constructed. Reminiscence writing goes some way towards filling an imagined void produced by severance from the 'old' pre-migratory self, as the subject-in-process continues to experience a liminal state. Of this state, Rhys's character Selina says in 'Let Them Call it Jazz': 'I come so far I lose myself on that journey.'²¹ Many of the stories connect the old world with the new as a means of constructing a new identity which can function in a different society.

Having considered the motivation for, and the function of, this writing, the unique conditions of its production should also be explained. It departs from the published autobiographical material of in the following sections in one very important respect: it has often been mediated through a third party. As is clear

from the quotations above, much of this writing has been solicited and influenced by a mediator, and more often than not, in the 1970s, that was likely to be a white tutor. Since there is clearly a race/class/power differential that exists between tutor and learner, we should recognise the extent to which this renders analysis of the writing problematic. In my interview with Rebecca O'Rourke on her work in the 1970s at Centreprise, I asked her if Caribbean women were more likely to write about home than their experiences in Britain. O'Rourke explained that it was very difficult to ascertain what they might *choose* to write about, since they were likely to produce what they perceived the tutor would expect.²² 'Pleasing the teacher' had an added cultural value with respect to Caribbeans, who generally arrived in Britain with a strong reverence for education and teachers, and, in some cases, with the aforementioned fear associated with such authority figures. As in the case of Wiltshire and Shore, work by students with limited literacy skills was initially transcribed from tapes. In this respect, the method connects with the problematics associated with narratives such as *The Scarlet Thread, An Indian Woman Speaks: Her Story as told to Rachel Barton* which remains suspect in terms of its white western scribe's intervention.²³

The Scarlet Thread is part of a controversial tradition of reconstituted accounts from subjects who cannot (for political or practical reasons) publish their own life-histories. Such accounts are overtly political and claim to release what is repressed under local conditions. In a sense, Shore's coming to Britain and attending Centreprise meant that she was indeed liberated from the fear of what her local community might have thought of her desire to write. Carolina Maria de Jesus was similarly motivated to write in order to be released from the oppressive poverty of the Brazilian favela (shantytown). However, her diary, which was obtained, edited and translated by a journalist, provides a paradigmatic case of the way in which such writing can be commercially and politically appropriated to represent a generalised working-class (in Carolina's case an underclass) experience. The eventual publication of Carolina's diary, which records her life in the Brazilian favelas from 1955-1959, was certainly not

achieved with the aid of a locally supportive community, as the Federation autobiographies were. Neither should it be regarded as representing the life of a typical favela woman: in fact she was treated by her immediate community with great suspicion for her obvious need to write, and one of her prime motivations for recording her daily attempts at survival was, quite simply, as a means of revenge on their narrow-mindedness. Of her 'cheating' and intolerant neighbours, she says: 'When they upset me, I write. I know how to dominate my impulses. I had only two years of schooling, but I got enough to form my character. The only thing that does not exist in the favela is friendship.'²⁴ The diary was translated into English in 1961, subsequently became a Brazilian best-seller, and was distributed world-wide. Its translator, David St. Clair was motivated by the desire to expose the extreme poverty of the favelas - indeed the 'Preface' makes this intention explicit. But it is the way in which the text was obtained, edited and translated that has given rise to the charge of misappropriation. *Here, the diary-extract describes how Carolina came to be 'discovered' as a writer:*

Then I went to wash clothes. While the clothes were bleaching I sat on the sidewalk and wrote.

A man passed by and asked me:

'What are you writing?'

'All the cheating that the favela dwellers practise. Those human wrecks.'

He said:

'Write it and give it to an editor so he can make revisions.'²⁵

As readers, we may never know exactly what 'revisions' Audalio Dantas, the young reporter, made. Claiming that 'The words and ideas are Carolina's. All I did was edit', Dantas presents the editorial process as transparent.²⁶ Else Riberio Pires Viera explains that Dantas's editorial skills employed a language of solidarity to construct the author as 'Our sister Carolina', although De Jesus's own text renders such a notion of 'grass roots' sisterhood highly suspect.²⁷ Claire Buck's insight, which is directed at this type of appropriation, suggests that outside intervention produces 'accounts which straddle the distinction between

autobiography and ethnological autobiography' by claiming the work as representative of 'the "other" side to histories already told'.²⁸ The role of the mediating voice, as that of someone from outside the community, is deeply problematic, and the following observation by Buck acknowledges the cultural impact of a white mediator on black expression:

These various works claim to recapture the 'real' experience of women whom a racist and sexist society has otherwise rendered silent, but it may also be argued that they represent the 'selves' blacks have been constrained to construct for whites, since the experience of the informants is, on an obvious level, mediated by those they address.²⁹

The construction of Carolina de Jesus is completed for the reader in the opening remarks of St. Clair's 'Translator's Preface'. He reduces her and her work to a stereotypical 'diary of a simple uneducated slum Negress', even though an alternative reading of her life, her resourcefulness and her creative spirit, would suggest that she was far from 'simple'.³⁰ Of course, it is probable that de Jesus had the wisdom to collude with St. Clair's presentation of her as the 'simple Negress', since she was unlikely to obtain any other opportunity of escaping the grinding poverty of the favela by the means of her writing.

It may be possible, although fraught with difficulties, to attempt to discern the influence of a mediator in comparing the content of autobiographical material from Federation groups, such as *So This is England* (1984), with later publications which reminisce about the same period but which have been generated within an exclusively Caribbean group. Writing produced in the late-1970s and early-1980s was likely to have been generated from within a mixed racial and gendered group, and to have been directed by a white tutor/facilitator. Later reminiscence projects are much more likely to have had a black facilitator, such as those collections of autobiographical essays produced by women in Chapeltown, and those generated by the Gloucester Elders in *A Long Five Years* (1995) - both being edited by young women of Caribbean descent within the last six years. These later projects - which were more concerned with celebrating

black experience than with literacy or creativity - still faced the problem of beginner writers who were not accustomed to choosing and shaping the material of their lives as suitable subject-matter. Work with such groups will always involve direction over the material and by comparing several examples of reminiscence writing some of the underlying assumptions of the facilitator may be discernible. As an example, *When Our Ship Comes In* (1992), was edited by Palorene Williams and removes the charge of specifically 'white' mediation - or, indeed, of the need for self-censorship in the presence of whites - which one of its writers, Fay Comrie, describes in this way:

In our group we are able to speak the truth and we understand one another. We speak the same meaning. We suffer the same way. We have it hard the same way, so when we talk we understand what we are talking about. We can speak among us as black women but if we were to go into another community we would have to sit quiet. We might have something to say but we would sit on it. Here we can express ourselves. If there was a white woman we wouldn't let out as much. But we can say we are safe here with one another.³¹

The point here is that, whilst the absence of white women may well have contributed to a safe and frank exchange of black experience, there is still the possibility of editorial direction that may distort that experience. Williams's shaping of the material is inevitably framed by her own motivation to celebrate the lives of women whom she loves, quite simply, for their blackness: she declares in her introduction 'I love old Black women because one day I hope to be an old Black woman'.³² Such a powerful motivator may inhibit the expression of material which contradicts the underpinning assumptions about what constitutes 'blackness' for Williams.

On the other hand, Federation facilitators, not explicitly concerned with celebrating 'blackness' as such, were likely to perceive *any* life experience as a potential means of developing literacy skills and expression. This technique has been consistently promoted by adult literacy tutors, and was inspired by the pedagogy of Paolo Freire. Liberation of the oppressed must involve literacy acquisition, and a move towards a re-conceptualisation based on agency not

helplessness. The first step in this process is: 'A pedagogy which begins with the oppressed first *speaking* and then *writing* his own word.'³³ The role of the teacher in this process is a sensitive one:

The coordinator, less of a teacher, enables him to speak his word, to re-extentialise the words of his world. The generating word is put into written form while the learner develops his consciousness of witness to history of which he becomes author.³⁴

Tutor/facilitators who were engaged in literacy and creative-writing projects associated with the Federation would have been politically committed to ideas which claimed literacy acquisition as an essential tool in the liberation of neo-colonial cultures from capitalist structures of poverty. Indeed, there were some actual links between the Caribbean and early Federation politics, in that Chris Searle (the co-founder of the Federation in 1976) became an active member of the New Jewel Movement in Grenada after the 1979 'almost bloodless coup'.³⁵ As someone who worked for the revolution in the Ministry of Education, Searle held that the principle of literacy acquisition was an essential part of a much larger bid for social change. He describes his personal vision of empowerment for the Grenadian people in this way:

There was the joy of education, of seeing your children achieving free secondary schooling and your illiterate mother learning how to read and write, the joy of seeing wasted unemployed youths forming co-operatives and planting the idle land. There was the joy of free health care, of walking to see a doctor or dentist in your local health clinic and knowing that the few dollars you had would stay in your pocket that morning...³⁶

Federation writing was generated in the spirit of the Searle's philosophy, and strenuous attempts were made to avoid charges of appropriation. Indeed, Shore's *Pure Running* and many other community publications are very careful to include introductions which name extra-textual facilitators and detail the development from writing to print. The development of Shore's book is described as follows:

This book has been taped and dictated, and re-read and re-shaped and agreed between us at all stages. It comes from dialogue, of which only Louise's side is recorded. The language it uses changed from one part to another, but it is all in the range of a Jamaican speaking to white friends, and none of it has been changed to London English, because the story and the way it is told belong together.

The above acknowledges a method of successful collaboration that enabled Shore to produce her life-story from a dialogue in which 'only Louise's side' is important enough to be 'recorded'. *Pure Running: A life story*, was finally published in 1982, narrated in a voice which captures the distinctive language register, syntax and vocabulary of Caribbean speakers, it offers an account of her experience at the hands of London landlords, confidence tricksters, sexual predators and the police. Shore describes an experience common to many other Caribbean women when they arrived in Britain, desperate to find accommodation in a country where rented rooms openly displayed the 'No Blacks' sign. Here, she relates how living in shared rooms results in the loss of her few best possessions:

After work I went straight home, and I see my suitcase on the stairs. I didn't know what to do. All my good things everything was gone, and the rest of the things was on the floor, and the suitcase and my coat was on the stairs. Why it happen was his woman come back again, and Mrs Johnson reported I was living there, and when she come she see the room let, she come and take my things and put them outside.

That's why, no matter how my rent is, I wouldn't share with nobody, and I wouldn't want nobody share with me.³⁷

When Shore calls the police to mediate between herself and a bullying landlord, she reacts defiantly to what she sees as their automatic attempt to place her in the wrong: 'I didn't frighten for the police, the police is a man like myself.'³⁸ She also gives a convincing and harrowing account of how she is deceived by a man she has been forced to trust. Shore has been targeted by the aptly named 'Hunter':

So after all this go from one place to another. I was living up in Acton. I met this man called Hunter. He saw me, and he invite me down, and he say that he's interested in me, and I was to come and see him.³⁹

Later, she begins to sense the 'trouble' that would see her humiliated and conned out of her savings by him:

After I went to Wembley, I was working and we pay one rent, and we save, and we begin to pay the money. So one day, he say to me, ask for time off, and meet him in Marble Arch, and we go to see this solicitor. And we went to the solicitor, sign up and everything, and Mr Barron agreed, and we were going to buy the house. So I say to Hunter, "What we doing? We buy house just as friends, or what? He say, "No, after that we get engaged". But we never got round to it.

One evening I come from work, I see a letter for Mrs Hunter. The minute I saw the letter, it means someone else coming in, and that was a shock for me, because it must mean that he was hiding something. And so it was. I say "Mrs....?" and I put the letter down on the table, and I was cooking, but I couldn't cook any more, I just couldn't do nothing...⁴⁰

Shore reacts badly to the knowledge of Hunter's exploitation of her, but internalises the pain and keeps silent when questioned by her work friends:

I just keep talking this thing round, this thing I shouldn't really talk about. Anyway I feel so sick after that letter, I went to work, and everyone keep asking me what happen. I say, "I don't know I couldn't tell you anything." I have to stop from work then. I have to go to the doctor. Doctor say I was very sick, and for I have to keep going, he give me an injection.⁴¹

As a foreign immigrant, alone, unable to trust anyone, including the forces of the law, Shore becomes withdrawn and effectively voiceless. Questioned by work colleagues, she answers: 'I don't know I couldn't tell you anything'. She finally stops eating, becomes seriously ill and succumbs to mental breakdown:

So I wasn't cooking, I wasn't eating, I wasn't doing nothing, and the doctor say well, I have nervous breakdown, and I couldn't go to work, just have to stop. There wasn't anybody around I could talk to.⁴²

In a very real sense, it is in her autobiography that she re-discovers her 'lost' voice: now well able to 'tell you anything', and in her writing, finding many readers she can 'talk to'. As noted earlier, by chance, in both content and narrative voice, *Pure Running* is strikingly similar to Jean Rhys's short story 'Let Them Call it Jazz'.⁴³ But where Rhys's work is celebrated as a fine piece of literary writing, Shore's painfully authentic account of similar experience has acquired its value - as a record of resistance and triumph over terrible odds - within Federation groups of readers and writers, continuing to circulate, some fifteen years after its original publication, amongst their membership.

The spirit of collaboration and support so sensitively executed in the production of *Pure Running*, provides a paradigm of empowerment through literacy. However, we should keep in mind the notion that Caribbean members of the Federation would have been placed in a significantly different position - in terms of their language - to the majority membership of the Federation, made up of white working-class adults. For a local group of writers, such as Liverpool's Scotland Road, a shared 'Scouse' dialect would have unified a working-class membership. However, the range and diversity of Caribbean language, would have highlighted an obvious difference, not only from British working-class writers, but also from writers from other regions in the Caribbean. Louise Shore's Jamaican patois was modified for the convenience of 'white friends' and readers; and her case raises the problematic issue of language standardisation, and the difficulty of maintaining the writer's authentic voice whilst at the same time rendering it accessible to other language speakers. Caribbeans in Britain needed to acquire standardised English even though they were literate in their regional tongue, one example being an anonymous St Lucian writer, fluent in French Creole patois, who could function perfectly well at home, but on arrival in England 'had to learn a new language and a new way of life'.⁴⁴ The degree to which a member would experience a sense of belonging to a particular Federation group would also have been affected by a class alliance which was not so clearly defined for Caribbeans - as discussed in Chapter 2 (p.52-53).

Caribbean migrants' class position often shifted quite dramatically and we should bear in mind, too, that their alliance with a working-class organisation did not guarantee their left-wing politics. Therefore, their downward class positioning on arrival in Britain may well have brought them into other forms of conflict with their left-wing facilitators.

Having acknowledged how some of the conditions of production created difficulties, particularly those associated with language and mediation, we might now turn to some of the problematic characteristics associated with community-published autobiographies. On close inspection, what are some of the essential distinctions between this writing and that which has come to be designated 'literature'? Community-published reminiscences are not often of interest to literary critics (though they are to historians), on the grounds that the rough form of the work gives them little currency outside of the immediate world of their author. When the Federation initially sought funding from the Arts Council in 1976, there was a fierce debate about the organisation's relationship to notions of 'literature'. The Federation opposed the Arts Council's assertion that the writing was parochial and should be funded as such - through regional community arts projects. Melvyn Bragg, who chaired the Arts Council committee during the Federation's bid for funding, supported the application on the grounds that it might promote good reading habits:

Apart from the chairman, the committee was entirely opposed to supporting the FWWCP in any way. Bragg said that he was not impressed with the writing but he did feel that the FWWCP was doing a potentially good job in encouraging working-class people to read literature.⁴⁵

Bragg had a point about the nature of writing which is produced without preconceived notions - those gained through reading and education - about what constitutes 'literature'. In my interview with Nick Pollard (long-time member and editor of *FEDeration*), he acknowledged the 'problem' for beginner writers who had read little. Some of the manuscripts which he had seen were 'unreadable':

NP The Majority of them are unreadable, in the way that they're constructed because there is no idea of an audience, for one thing. A lot of people, perhaps, who publish stuff through the Federation - if you go to some of the groups who are not critical, and that's evident in the publication - you pick the thing up and think 'My God who is going to read this?' But funnily enough, surprisingly it will sell quite well. Some of the Merseyside groups - if they weren't Federation publications - I probably wouldn't look twice at, but they will still sell, people will still read them.⁴⁶

People buy the material because, Pollard said, 'It [that experience] isn't available anywhere else.'⁴⁷ Certainly, it will not be available within mainstream literary culture, which excludes 'unreadable' works existing outside of the aegis of high art. But the very existence of these autobiographies proves people do want to write and read about these kinds of experience, and that their availability is more important than seeking to meet the demand to be conventionally artistic or literary.

The examples of autobiography presented in this section testify to the fact that 'ordinary' Caribbean women did come to Britain and find a way of writing about and publishing their experiences. Regardless of anxieties about editorial mediation and parochiality, some of the community publications discussed above remain in print and have sold many copies. Whilst not all of them exclude literary value, however difficult that is to define, their popularity certainly indicates a cultural validity for what Simon Dentith calls their 'originating constituencies'.⁴⁸ Unlike many other specialist publishing houses that originated in the 1970s, Centreprise has survived since 1972, and its achievement is summed up in the following:

Actually publishing is a small part of the Project's work. Local writers who bring their work will receive - as well as an invitation to join a relevant group - a thoughtful consideration of their writing, even if we are unable to consider it for publication. We interpret 'publishing' in the sense of 'making public', organising exhibitions, talks and readings by local writers. The project not only promotes the books themselves, but the belief that the working class -

including women, and those from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds - have the right to the expression of their own feelings and experiences.⁴⁹

It is difficult to imagine where else Caribbean women writers of the kind presented above would have found a safe enough space in which to begin to discover a written form for their life-stories. And it is a significant indicator of those different value systems underpinning the worlds of commercial and community publishing, and of the 'constituencies' they serve, that Louise Shore's *Pure Running: a life story* (1982) and Pauline Wiltshire's *Living and Winning* (1985) continue to be reprinted and sold to date - unlike much of the more 'literary' writing by Caribbean women considered in this study.⁵⁰

6.3 The Recovery of Beryl Gilroy's *Black Teacher* as Literature

Like Shore's *Pure Running*, *Black Teacher* is also still in print although it has been assigned a rather different value which will be explained below. Its reissue by Bogle-L'Ouverture in 1994 might lead us to assume that its place in literary history is assured but it is rarely designated Caribbean *literature*. As part of the literary history of Caribbean women's writing, this section will explain how Gilroy's autobiography came to be published originally, and was subsequently reclaimed because of its *documentary* value as a sociological and educational text. Her book is recognisably a woman's version of E.R.Brathwaite's *To Sir, With Love*: it covers some of the similar autobiographical territory and shares something of Brathwaite's pedantry and style. However, it has never been considered as a possible 'entertainment', or as a work of literature, in the way that *To Sir, With Love* has. Brathwaite's depiction of institutional racism which was appropriated for an international cinema audience in a film that Prahbu Guptara claims made him 'aware of black people in Britain for the first time', and which provided an emotional experience for its 1960s cinema audience, was originally published in 1959 and is currently in print.⁵¹ It was, and still is, promoted as 'The

best-selling story of a negro teacher in a tough school in London's East End'.⁵² However, in contrast with the popular appeal suggested in such marketing of Brathwaite's tale, *Black Teacher's* 1994 reprint tells us that it is 'essential reading not only for the teaching profession, but also for social workers and educationalists, for its insights into working-class mores of the 1950s'.⁵³ It is most usually ignored as *writing*. In so far as I have been able to discover, Guptara is the only critic to compare Gilroy's and Brathwaite's autobiographies and to consider their content in relation to literature. In *Black British Literature: An Annotated Bibliography*, he posits the following:

Surely, the distinction between literature and sociology is precisely that literature offers us the experience of what it feels like to be an individual or a member of a certain group, while sociology concerns itself with cognitive knowledge or with people in the mass.⁵⁴

The present section will argue that *Black Teacher* should be recuperated as an example of women's *literary* expression: as literature which offers us an imaginative experience of what it felt like to be a black woman in Britain in the 1950s and '60s. To begin with an explanation of how Gilroy came to publish her autobiography, and of how her work was differently appropriated to Brathwaite's, we must start with her experience of coming to Britain. Gilroy transferred, in 1951, from British Guiana to University College London. She was, on arrival, already a qualified and respected teacher back home, but in spite of this, racism denied her the opportunities for professional employment in Britain. Life at the university was congenial, but although she was a colonial student at a London college at a similar time to Gladwell, she moved in rather different circles. Gilroy's intellectual and social life revolved around the British Council hostel for overseas students at Hans Crescent in Knightsbridge, which had a small theatre and a bar. Here, she was nourished by readings from Shakespeare and by the friendship of Sylvia Wynter. As part of an educated elite, she 'had a wonderful time', but once outside of this circle, her identity was threatened by the awareness

that, to the majority of British subjects, she was an 'illiterate savage'.⁵⁵ In 1951, with few female black migrants in London, her presence caused a stir and, like Gladwell, she testifies to the fact that journeying through London was particularly harrowing. The young Beryl's colour and 'exotic' beauty provoked both racial abuse and sexual harassment:

Our women's concerns were with getting from A to B safely, without being assaulted by the Teddy Boys or chased by the grandparents of the National Front, the members of the League of Empire Loyalists.⁵⁶

After finishing university, she expected to work as a teacher, but the operation of a 'colour bar' forced her to find alternative employment. As an example, the following passage tells of her experience as a clerk in an East End mail order sweat shop and of her response to the racial abuse which issued from her supervisor:

Teachers in my country signed their arrival at work. The only difference was Mickey saying, 'Sign the right time. You blacks wouldn't know the truth even if it bit you.'

One day he burst out laughing and put his arms round me. 'You can say what you like, ' I spat at him, 'but don't you ever, ever put your hands on me again.' 'Oh, don't get your knickers in a knot!' Mickey grumbled, trying to imply that it had all been a joke. 'Bwana is doing you a favour.'

I was sure he was trying to diminish me in my own mind, and to lodge within me a little seed of doubt.

I often asked myself questions about my people. Were we, as a race, unreliable, thievish, dirty and lazy? After all, I didn't know *everyone* outside my village. And what about the one bath a week whites? What of those who washed their kids with spit? Were we worse than them? (p.16)

In the above, she describes how her self-respect is undermined to the point where she actually begins to consider the possibility that she might be descended from a defective race. In a moment of self-doubt, Gilroy faces up to the fact that the British had long been fed on images of life in the colonies determined by the ethnography of nineteenth-century anthropologists. Absorbed into the British consciousness were pseudo-scientific explanations which served the colonial

enterprise. Both Gladwell and Gilroy attempted to deal with their alienation by seeking out an understanding of the roots of this racism. In *Brown Face, Big Master* Gladwell stumbles across this early twentieth-century example in St Hilary's library. The entry, in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, educates the reader on how to encounter 'the negro':

The Negro in certain ...characteristics... would appear to stand on a lower evolutionary plane than the white man, and to be more closely related to the highest anthropoids. [...] Mentally the Negro is inferior to the white... We must necessarily suppose that the development of the Negro and white proceed on different lines. While with the latter the volume of the brain grows with the expansion of the brain pan, in the former the growth of the brain is on the contrary arrested by the premature closing of the cranial sutures and lateral pressure on the frontal bone. This explanation is reasonable... but evidence is lacking on the subject and the arrest or even deterioration in mental development is no doubt very largely due to the fact that after puberty sexual matters take the first place in the Negro's life and thoughts... The mental constitution of the Negro is very similar to that of a child, normally good-natured and cheerful, but subject to sudden fits of emotion and passion during which he is capable of performing acts of singular atrocity, impressionable, vain, but often exhibiting the capacity of servant a dog-like fidelity which has stood the supreme test.⁵⁷

This helps to explain why it is that, in London, Gilroy finds that *she is* consistently assumed to be an illiterate African, a heathen, and 'lecherous, incontinent and depraved.'⁵⁸ Such confrontations drew on Gilroy's resourcefulness and creativity, and she defended herself with words - as in the following incident narrated in *Black Teacher*, in which she inverts the very notion of 'Englishness' to silence a group of jeering men:

The men were still standing there - still grinning and shouting nonsense. I walked over to them and said, 'Are you English-men? If you are, you are a peculiar kind. English-men don't stare and shout at women. I've never known them to. Who are you? Do you really know? Their surprise gave way to embarrassment. (p.68)

Such incidents were commonplace, but were lessened by her subsequent marriage to an English-man who provided her with the knowledge, physical protection and security that she needed to survive. Importantly, it was he who helped her make sense of what she found to be an unexpectedly alien British society. As she states: 'Subconsciously, I suppose I saw him as a buffer between this society and myself and as someone who could interpret its subtle nuances for me.' (p.104)

This sketch of Gilroy's encounter with British racism indicates why sociologists might analyse *Black Teacher* as though it were intended to represent a general phenomenon. But what is of interest here is the fact that, as a creative writer, Gilroy wrote and published an autobiography which was precisely *not* the general experience. Indeed, it is her unique perspective, as a professional black woman in Britain, that separates her writing from that of others. *Black Teacher* is an interpretation and reconstruction of her (remarkable) experience, and describes far more than her work with children. However, *Black Teacher* was not regarded as popular entertainment, not because *To Sir, With Love* was better or differently written, but primarily because the series of infant schools in which she worked would rule out the potential for the sexual chemistry provided by Brathwaite's encounter with his pubescent class (embodied cinematically in Sidney Poitier's brooding performance). The reason why Gilroy's text, which deals with racial confrontation in the setting of the workplace, would be claimed for socio-educational purposes is, therefore, easily imagined. As possible 'literature', its central concerns - a young teacher's quest to counter racial discrimination whilst finding ways of managing her infant class - might have been regarded at the time of its publication as having only specialist appeal. To understand why it is that the text has been consistently overlooked as an example of Caribbean *writing*, the circumstances which determined its content and form - and which prompted its publication need to be recovered.

To Sir, With Love was written and published in the late 1950s, before 'the problem' of multiculturalism had been forced on to the political agenda. The fact

that *Black Teacher* came to be written and published in 1976 was very much a matter of its timeliness: that is, that her experience was deemed worthy of the attention of contemporary education professionals (and was thus marketable). It also relates to the conditions which instigated the need for further legislation (1976 Race Relations Act) to deal with indirect racial discrimination in the workplace.⁵⁹ Gilroy's unique perspective had already attracted the attention of the media: in 1973, there had been an article on Gilroy's work in *The Evening Standard* with the headline: 'It's like a Mini UN at Beckford Infant's School'.⁶⁰ Subsequently, she was asked to read a short piece on her experiences on the BBC's *Woman's Hour*, and was immediately solicited by the publishers, Cassell, to write a full-length work. The autobiography was sought out for its contribution to the debate on the way in which the British education system was failing its multicultural intake. The mood of black parents was increasingly one of resistance and anger, and by 1981, the Rampton Committee had been forced to produce eighty-one recommendations for action to be taken by schools to address the under-achievement of black children.⁶¹ Gilroy's autobiography was an important document in evidencing the conditions which contributed to those recommendations and she later claimed to have written the work out of a growing sense of anger at them:

My autobiography resulted from a fit of pique. After hearing the older generation of blacks in Britain being pilloried as "Topsies and Toms," I decided to set the record straight. There had been Ted Brathwaite's *To Sir, With Love* and Don Hinds's *Journey to an Illusion*, but a woman's experiences had never been published. As I wrote, my anger mounted when I recalled the experiences of my contemporaries - false accusations by the police, innocent people being beaten up, black men being offered drinks of urine disguised as beer, and expulsion from clubs and public places were day-to-day occurrences in their lives. There were no race-relations apparatus, no pressure groups, no media to bring the news into drawing-rooms as it happened.⁶²

A role in the history of British race relations also provided Gilroy with the opportunity to use her writing for its 'enormous therapeutic, restorative, and

energising value.⁶³ It was a personal quest for self-assertion which coincided with a need for documentary evidence.

On its publication, the autobiography was reviewed in a press which refused to consider the work as anything other than to do with education. Whilst Gilroy's humour and fighting-spirit were generally celebrated, the reviewers found it flawed by occasional moments of self-congratulation. The following appraisal by Edward Blishen, writing for the *Guardian*, draws attention to his discomfort with this 'self-applause':

About all this [the struggle to be treated decently] she writes in the face of the usual difficulty - that a teacher with a success to report can easily sound self-approving. But if one blushes for Mrs Gilroy (and maybe for oneself) when she says, 'slowly I built up in these children a need to achieve,' et cetera, there's much more that makes the point with no suggestion of self-applause.⁶⁴

Roy Blatchford, a teacher of English at Stockwell Manor Comprehensive School, reviewed the book for the *Times Educational Supplement* and declared it 'a hit', describing it 'as Bess to Edward Brathwaite's Porgy'. However, his comparison of the two texts, ultimately allows him to declare *Black Teacher* surplus to requirements:

This is, at times, a well-written, sensitive, often moving tale of school life, but the author can be embarrassingly over-sentimental and cloying in her repetition of anecdotes. Does she really remember all those interchanges down to dropped Hs and 'Sucks and Knickers to you Miss'?

We hear plenty of Nig-Nog, Nig-Pig and Wog hurled in her direction, about segregation in the loo, and her fight to be black and accepted. Her trials in the fifties were deplorably the common lot for the immigrant. None the less, is it worth yet another voicing? Can the publishers seriously ask that the book should be taken to heart by educationalists and parents?⁶⁵

'[I]s it worth yet another voicing?' rests on Blatchford's assumption that the text is of possible value only as a kind of teaching manual of the 'dealing with racism in the classroom' variety. And he seems keen to bury the experience of racism in the 'trials [of] the fifties,' - precisely at a time (in the mid-seventies) when racial

tensions were in fact running very high. He does not concede that Gilroy's work might have an entirely different value for a black woman reader, and he ends with the churlish suggestion that her rise to a headship was accomplished with much more ease than the autobiography would lead us to believe:

A few years off for her own mixed-marriage and private play groups, and the charismatic Mrs Gilroy swept back to the North London school where she is now head-mistress, denouncing licence, proclaiming classroom freedom, combating parental slings and arrows, suffering little kids, cuddling and comforting.⁶⁶

Blatchford thus dismisses Gilroy's personal achievements, attributing them to a 'charismatic' personality rather than to professional skill or a genuinely pioneering approach. His review questioned the need for such a text, and *Black Teacher* went out of print after 1976.

However, it was just these personal skills and qualities which she successfully employed to fight institutional racism that justified *Black Teacher's* reprint by Bogle-L'Ouverture in 1994. Reva Klein interviewed Gilroy for *The Times Educational Supplement* on its reissue, and concluded that 'It is as eye-opening and relevant today as it was first time around.'⁶⁷ By the time it was reissued, Klein found Gilroy more aggressive and pessimistic than she had been in the interviews she gave in the 1970s:

Today, 18 years on from when *Black Teacher* first appeared. Beryl Gilroy looks back in anger at the hardships she faced. "I have struggled so much here for my identity as a healthy, competent, thinking black woman and have had difficulties with the expectations of the white world as a black woman. Sometimes people would patronise me. They would make a beeline for my secretary because black people aren't heads. They'd expect me to be the cleaner with a collapsible mop and bucket. [...] Sometimes I wonder why it is that more black people don't go mad."⁶⁸

Of course, the intervening years had done little to convince her that her fight for equality - as a teacher, as an ethno-psychotherapist and as a writer - was complete, and the reissue of *Black Teacher* in 1994 highlighted how little

progress had been made in the area of racial (and sexual) equality. The reprint still advertises its usefulness for 'the teaching profession' but *Black Teacher* has also become part of a wider discourse on black British history of the Windrush generation. Indeed, as agents of change, Gilroy, E.R. Brathwaite and George Lamming were recently asked to describe their early experiences of Britain as part of the fifty-year celebrations of the docking of the Empire Windrush. In 'Uses of History', Rena Jeneja explains, in general terms, what Gilroy's autobiography endorses specifically:

Total hegemony is never achieved because subversion and resistance are ever-present counter forces, and even in the most oppressive circumstances human beings continue to exercise choices and actions that have the potency to alter social order. History in these texts is not merely to be suffered but also to be shaped, made, recreated and redirected.⁶⁹

As a postcolonial text, *Black Teacher* is obviously an important part of the documentary history of British race relations, but it may also now be considered as a work which has 'shaped, made, recreated and redirected' Caribbean women's literature. My treatment of it here concludes with a brief description of some of the book's more interesting formal properties which may suggest its potential for further literary-critical analysis.

Prior to the writing of *Black Teacher*, Gilroy, like Lamming and Selvon, wrote a novel of migration: *In Praise of Love and Children*. This was submitted to a publisher in the 1960s, but she tells how it was rejected by a Caribbean male advisor. In a sense, then, the autobiography which she published so easily in the 1970s enabled her to explore many of the features which we might now associate with her fiction. In *Black Teacher*, Gilroy was experimenting, in an intermediary form - somewhere between fiction and autobiography, with structure and dialogue to find an imaginative voice that would finally be recognised through the publication of her novels in the late-1980s. In terms of its structure, it is quite differently organised to the other full-length autobiographies presented in this

chapter. We might expect Gilroy to begin, as do Gladwell and Iremonger, with some description of her childhood and the formative stages of her life, but *Black Teacher* departs from this linear autobiographical convention in its chronological progression. Gilroy introduces the main character (herself) by beginning her story from the perspective of the present - a point at which she (the 'heroine') has already conquered the difficulties she is about to relate. She opens with a snatched conversation with her husband which reveals that she is about to leave home for another day as head teacher at her Camden school, and then shifts the narrative back to her expectations on leaving university. The text thereafter moves forward from 1953, through thirteen short chapters depicting battles to get work as a teacher, until we finally see her promoted to her headship. If we were to attend to the absences in the text, we might question why there is no sustained account of her childhood, or of the type of early formative experiences that Gladwell painstakingly recalls. In fact, there are very few references to British Guiana - except where it serves as a comparison to her current situation. Unlike Lucille Iremonger's account of her character-forming childhood in Jamaica, Gilroy focuses on a character-building experience which is exclusively set in Britain. This format had also been employed by Brathwaite in his two autobiographies, *To Sir, With Love* (1959) and *Paid Servant* (1962), and was possibly seen as more appealing to a wider British readership with little knowledge or interest in faraway British Guiana.

From the outset, Gilroy's autobiography is self-consciously concerned with a need to cast herself as a gifted multi-racial teacher and as a British citizen - a point which is reiterated through its constant denial by the institutions and people that employ her. A desire for recognition underlies the numerous examples given of her teaching methods and the 'repetition of anecdotes' which irritated Blatchford. It is this estranged narrator who frequently intervenes to provide some item of instruction:

Children who are socially handicapped and who lack close contact with adults - adults who will listen to them - need the opportunity to express grouses or confidences. (p.144)

The third-person 'pedantic' narrator alternates with an autobiographical 'I' which is at times self-doubting, and confesses to the contingencies presented by a contradictory societal position. The following is an example in which she describes the need to protect her young family from being damaged by the racism prevalent in her own school and the wider society:

My own children were now nine and six years old, and it became an economic necessity that I should seek promotion. The children attended private schools in my area because they were accepted there, with tolerance and humanity. They never had to defend their colour or their hair, or bother about identity. Nor were the traditional names of affection, like Sambo, Topsy or Fuzzy, ever used to them. (p.160)

Furthermore, the 'self-applause' which Blishen found embarrassing is an indivisible part of a text which must reconstruct a self-esteem under constant attack from the assumption that she is 'an immigrant who had to be twice as good as everyone else'. (p.108) Blishen may also have been squeamish about a text which is loaded with images of a black woman's body and its functions. His review predates critical discussion, now familiar through postcolonial readings, that has traced obsessions and suspicions associated with the 'Other's' mysterious bodily characteristics.⁷⁰ When she begins teaching, children and parents are especially afraid of her hands, believing their blackness to be malevolent and her touch demonic: 'black 'ands like yours leave black marks.' (p.64) As an example, when Gilroy attempts to remove a wasp, the child screams out in terror: 'Don't ever touch me. Keep your hands off me!' The wasp is then removed by a passing tramp, and the effect of which is devastating, and causes a characteristic introspection and retreat:

The message rang out loud and clear. Rather the tramp and his filth, rather the wasp, rather even the sting of the wasp, than the slightest touch from me.

When we got back to our classrooms I began looking at my hands, almost as if I were seeing them for the first time. That night when I went out to dinner, it was an intelligent gathering but I took this new consciousness with me. At every introduction a handshake became a challenge. I dared not dance although I loved to dance in case some partner by look or gesture should reject my hands. (p.63)

This fear of her black body is a recurring theme in the text by way of anecdotes which reveal Gilroy's response to an obsession with it and its functions. In the following accusation, a teaching colleague, Mrs Burleigh, claims that she is responsible for contaminating the sacrosanct space of the female teachers' toilet with dribbles of urine:

'Did you notice that speck of wet on the floor in the loo, Mrs Ril?' she would begin. 'Did you notice? Dribs and drabs all over the place!' Poor Mrs Rilson would reply by accelerating her knitting speed. 'There never used to be specks of wet on the floor in the loo. Now we've started to having specks of wetness like polka dots on a summer frock all over the place. Disgusting I say it is. There must be gremlins with foreign habits in this school.' (p.52)

Mrs Burleigh is disturbed by foreign lavatory habits, and also remains convinced that a black person must be carrying life-threatening tropical diseases, insisting on separate crockery. In this instance, Gilroy's response is withdrawal from a painful situation by taking her break in the classroom or outside of the school: 'I wasn't involved in the appearance of specks in the lavatory. I couldn't be. I walked each lunch-break to the Tube station with my penny, whatever the weather.' (p.52)

However, the difficulties associated with the fight to establish equable social and professional relationships result in the occasional textual outburst which may leave 'the heroine', who must fight for racial equality, open to charges of inconsistency. Gilroy displaces her own feelings of rejection onto others and whilst the object of attack is the host culture, these appear perfectly justified. But

she also views the relatively easy passage of the new generation of immigrants as somehow potentially damaging to her own position:

Occasionally there would be a coloured face among our scanty and short-lived contingent of supply teachers. I couldn't get over the fact that an immigrant now seemed able to walk into teaching almost within hours of getting off the boat. It seemed a far cry from my pioneer days and desperate attempts to get started. (p.150)

A new generation of postcolonial immigrants are presented as troublesome and as lacking in the fighting spirit of the pioneers, and Gilroy reiterates the difference between her generation and the next in the following:

It was now the sixties, the age of the frenetic immigrant, whom many older immigrants see as the grabbers, the plum pickers, the protesters, the noisy people. The people who in some respects got off a boat into a virtual bed of roses and lost no time in trampling it. (p.121)

Of course, it was 'the age of the frenetic immigrant' which created the challenges of the multi-racial classroom, so that even though she has suffered from arbitrary discrimination herself, she occasionally lapses into a shorthand of racial stereotypes to appraise the difficulties associated with the simultaneous teaching of a mix of nationalities and of the widely conflicting expectations presented by parents:

The French, West Indians and Greeks wanted to see their children handcuffed to their tasks. The Asians would have liked passive children chanting their lessons- preferably under palms. The Italian and Spanish mums thought school a kind of conspiracy to deprive them of their right to mother their children and in doing so occupy their own time at home. From the English there was a more subtle and varied reaction, as one would expect. The variations stretched from 'you're doing a jolly good job' to regarding us as highly-paid child-minders. Many had 'read a book' and knew all about teaching. (p.189)

Relationships throughout the text are constructed, in the first instance, on a reciprocal interchange of prejudice - as in the following example from the days of Gilroy's employment as a ladies' maid. In the employment of Lady Anne, she is cast as a 'coloured' maid and is fearful of re-enacting the slave/mistress scenario. When she receives a present from her employer, delivered from Harrods, her immediate response is one of deep suspicion:

All the way home I tried to think what the package would contain. I knew whites. They presented their cast-offs with great ceremony and accepted heaps of gratitude in return. Sometimes it was something such as a Bible which in their opinion would civilise and enlighten the receiver. I'd told Lady Anne I'd never seen or owned a golliwog before coming to this country. Perhaps she'd sent me one. Perhaps it would be something exotic like frogs or sugared ants. [...]

Tearing off the wrappings I dipped into the beautiful box and felt a delightful kittenish softness. Inside was a pale cream angora twin set. I was deeply touched by the thoughtfulness that had gone into the choice of such a splendid present. (p.42)

Pre-existing social relations have damaged her ability to gauge the situation without prejudice, and she reverses a racial discourse of homogenisation in asserting: 'I knew whites.' But evidence forces her to confront the mismatch between label and individual. The text is enriched by such revelations of the extent to which social relations are damaged by prejudice, and of the way in which perception comes to 'mature only in a gnarled or distorted way'. Looking back, she stated: 'I learned to understand my own legitimate feelings of resentment and aggression and to understand theirs.'⁷¹

Given that *Black Teacher* was published over twenty years ago, Gilroy's text might now be regarded as proleptic in its depiction of the multi-faceted causes and effects of British racism, and it is this aspect of her work which recently attracted an honorary doctorate - for her services to education - from the University of North London. Gilroy has succeeded in being formally recognised as the gifted teacher and social analyst that she was intent on describing in the text. However, as an author who writes out of a literary tradition of Caribbean

and Black British literature, she is only now beginning to be more widely recognised, and then only for her novels of the 1980s and '90s. Gilroy has been honoured with literary awards in Britain and the United States for her work as a pioneering women writer but as her entry in the 1992 *Bloomsbury Guide to Women's Literature* mysteriously states: 'There has been little criticism of her writing to date.'⁷² Part of the 'problem' for literary critics may lie in the hybrid quality exemplified in *Black Teacher* (to what extent is it fictional, autobiographical, instructional?). And Gilroy's writing, loaded as it is with inconsistencies, refuses any possibility of casting her as a 'representative' black feminist or black nationalist. This makes for uncomfortable reading, for both black and white; as Gupta ventures to suggest, her portrayals 'provide reading that must chasten, and this is no doubt one reason why the book has not been a roaring success.'⁷³ Consequently she remains outside of the literary-critical pigeon-hole which might include *Black Teacher* as a postcolonial text. As a colonial writer, her work resists simple categorisation either in terms of its genre or its politics. This lack of critical attention may have much to do with her generation: in his appraisal of the relative obscurity of Brathwaite's and Gilroy's autobiographies, Gupta questions the justification of Brathwaite's dismissal:

Brathwaite's name seems to be mud among black people today. The book is not thought to be angry enough by today's black Briton, and it is accused of telling the success story of one black, in apparent isolation from the struggles of other blacks. However, nearly ten years after publication, *To Sir, With Love* was banned from schools in Jamaica.⁷⁴

It is now difficult to comprehend how Brathwaite's isolated 'success story' may have been dismissed because it was not considered radical enough, 'angry enough', or representative enough for a black British readership in the 1980s. Regardless of its political appropriateness and its status as 'Caribbean literature', Brathwaite's work will survive in popular memory as the book which inspired the film of *To Sir, With Love*. Gilroy's autobiography, however, may not survive at all if it remains bonded to its usefulness for sociologists and educationalists

alone. A reprint with a small specialist publisher, in this case Bogle-L'Ouverture, suggests a precarious future for the book; but a serious critical discussion of its more literary properties may just prevent it from going out of print for a second, and possibly final, time.

6.4 The Spiritual Quest: Joyce Gladwell's *Brown Face, Big Master*

Brown Face, Big Master was published almost thirty years ago and it remains virtually unknown.⁷⁵ After causing a storm on its release in 1969, the author and the work fell into obscurity, so that subsequently the work has remained outside the scrutiny of the Caribbean literary recuperative project. Without some knowledge of its historical context, it is difficult to appreciate the author's achievement in getting this work written and published. Inevitably, it raises an important question: given the paucity of published work by Caribbean women at this time, why would a young, unknown Jamaican woman write a full-length autobiography, and how did it come to be published? It seems important to address the problematics associated with a text which exists in a critical void. On finding this text in 1994 and attempting to analyse its provenance, its reception and its occlusion, it proved impossible to answer these questions without gaining access to information which seemed only available through the author. After a period of two years, I traced the author in 1996 to an address in Canada, achieved with the aid of network of contacts in Britain and Jamaica.⁷⁶ What follows is entirely dependent upon personal information, copies of reviews and publishers' letters which were supplied by Joyce Gladwell herself for the purposes of this research. This contextual 'evidence' enables meaningful connections to be made between the text, the historical conditions of its production, its reception in 1969 and its present obscurity.

Brown Face, Big Master is a significant example of one of the 'lost' texts of Caribbean literature in that it was held, at the time of its publication, to be both aesthetically accomplished and to be making a ground-breaking contribution in

the absence of Caribbean writing in the field of literature. It is also significant, for the purposes of this thesis, in that it provides an example, rarely documented in such detail, of how such an important work came to be lost. Its publication proved highly contentious in 1969, and its distribution was banned in Ireland and South Africa. It was never reprinted. Now, the tone of its religious fervour may prove unpalatable to the secularity of black nationalism and feminism, but *Brown Face, Big Master* is historically significant in that it evidences some important experience in Jamaican and black British history. Gladwell's autobiography provides a unique insight into 1950s and 1960s Britain from a West Indian woman's perspective, and as the back cover tells us, into 'some of the major social problems of our time - race, colour, human relationships, mixed marriage, the search for God.' At a time when some of the British media were apt to cast migrants as the source of such 'problems', *Brown Face* 'writes back' and provides insight into an aspect of migration which is little documented.

As previously discussed, West Indian students who arrived with scholarships, or who were privately funded, were differently orientated to the majority of migrants who came to Britain for work; when they returned home, their British experience - of education, of racism, of resistance - was critical to the revolution which took place in Caribbean arts, politics, and education. Walmsley explains how students, like Gladwell, were still drawn to the metropolis: 'In the 1960s, the decade of independence, ties between Britain and her former colonies were still strong. The cream of graduates from the University of West Indies still came to Britain for postgraduate study.'⁷⁷ It was this West Indian student presence in Britain which provided the conditions to form CAM as a means for validating creative expression at a time when such expression was being denied. But finding a means for *religious* expression was also vitally important to the majority of West Indians on arrival in Britain. Joyce Gladwell's autobiography results from the junction of two impulses: the need to 'tell' of her experience and the need to affirm her faith. The autobiography is ground-breaking in that it exposes much that would usually remain within the protected private domain of the West Indian

family. The work came into being primarily to document a fierce struggle to maintain Christian faith in the face of British racism and the isolation that racism brought in the early years of her mixed marriage. It also depicts very explicitly an oppressive childhood, the stifling colonial atmosphere of a Jamaican boarding-school and the psychological fragmentation incurred by transfer, in 1953, from rural Jamaica to London University.

Joyce Gladwell was born into the religious and highly disciplined Nation family in a small farming district of St Catherine in 1939. She begins her autobiography in this rural Jamaica of her childhood. Gladwell suffered from excessive control and isolation: she was not to obtain the type of temporary relief from parental 'guidance' that young children often acquire through their peer-group and their different relationships with teachers at school. For Joyce and her twin, Faith, school was an extension of home. They remained apart from local children by virtue of the fact that both parents taught at the school and that their father was the imposing head teacher:

If I felt my childhood was deprived it is in this sense: that we lacked gay abandon, romping childish fun and the companionship of equals. [...] At school, the other children did not treat us as equals; our father was the head teacher and we were 'teacher daughter', to be picked for the side in games because of our social position, not our prowess, to be asked favours, not to be bosom friends. (p.10)

The above describes the twins' ambivalent social position. In daily contact with the local black community, but not allowed to mix with children of their own age, they remain protected from developing any concept of alternative lives, and from questioning their own. More usually, they might have been expected to gain some awareness of their social existence by making comparisons with others in their immediate world. But the twins had little knowledge of poverty, religious diversity, alternative family models, local scandals; these were kept from them by a mother who physically separated the twins from other children in the play-yard. And so from the beginning of the autobiography, we understand that Gladwell

had spent her early life as the unhappy 'spectator, full of brooding thoughts.'
(p.11)

Gladwell's narration reveals the extent to which she is reared to be a very particular sort of person. Her societal place is meticulously planned and executed by a mother with a highly developed sense of the future for her children. It is assumed from the outset that Joyce and Faith will be religious, educated and refined; and that their ultimate goal in life should be marriage and children with a pale-skinned social superior. Gladwell frames the account of this preordained journey with an exploration of the various conflicts that this path presents to her. As a child, she is subjected to a form of religious indoctrination which now appears extreme: acts of blasphemy are to be avoided by adhering to rules which insist that the bible is placed on the top of a pile of books and that under no circumstance should the use of real prayers be made in doll's play. Much more serious than blasphemy are the acts of sexual 'deviation' that appear to surround and threaten the moral superiority of the Nation family. A troubled Joyce learns very early on that the local children born outside the sanctity of a Christian marriage are eternally damned. Misdemeanours are unlikely since the twins spend their time within sight of their parents, but Joyce's mother also achieves an unwavering control over the children by appearing to know the contents of their minds: they must confess every thought, desire and mild transgression to her. Joyce says: ' My mother seemed to scan my every thought; she watched us and supervised every moment of our time.' (p. 17) Fear of sin, with its assured descent into hell, is accompanied by adult standards of behaviour which are understandably difficult to meet. The pressure on the young Joyce to be morally impeccable brings with it an understandable instinct for escape. The unbearable spiritual, psychological and physical demands are flagged by Gladwell in a poem which opens the autobiography:

So she was caught,
like a fowl in a coop,
like a bird in a room,

like a cat in a moving car,
and for the moment she was frantic to escape. (p.7)

This feeling of being trapped provides one of the overriding motifs of the autobiography. An omnipresent God, caring but also demanding, was 'knitted into the fabric of our minds'. (p.19) However, it is the strength of this faith that will sustain Joyce when she becomes separated from the actual comfort and control of her family on departure to England.

But the autobiography is multi-vocal, and the voices which allow the adult to narrate the childhood experience, also confront the contradictions provided by a retrospective analysis. The narrating subject is unstable - sometimes 'we' and sometimes 'me' or 'I'. The 'we' might sometimes imply the distinct personalities of the 'before' and 'after' Joyce of childhood and adulthood; at other points of narration, the 'we' is a voice that speaks for both twins. It is clear that the unstable narrating voices are an important part of the organisation of events located in a past which now appears differently to the author. The act of writing the autobiography would allow these conflicting elements to emerge in the course of their re-discovery. Linda Warley describes the process thus: 'the autobiography represents a personal quest where the autobiographer traces his (sic) life by organising the narrative according to significant stages.'⁷⁸ Gladwell's 'quest' to organise the significant and shaping events of her early life causes a synthesis of past and present. The narrative comments on, evaluates and filters the past through a present understanding of events which is far from conclusive in its answers. The quest for understanding veers between celebration of the nobility of religious sacrifice and outright condemnation of her mother's religious obsession. This is characterised by the two following juxtaposed statements: 'where did we learn or inherit the [religious and moral] scrupulosity, the obsessiveness? Perhaps somewhere my mother had a hand in it': and

Perhaps, later we fought against God because we feared that, like Mama, He would limit our freedom and possess us completely. But in finding Him

eventually, we found the One who cared infinitely, though He was the 'God of the whole earth', cared for us as if there were no one else beside us. (p.18)

The above illustrates how, in the early part of the autobiography, the power of God and the figure of the mother become fused into one all-knowing, all-seeing figure. Both figures are, at times, deeply resented as an impossibly harsh model of Christian devotion. Joyce learns very early on that she must achieve her destiny through the 'goal of marriage' where she will be able to replicate her own moral training with children. Additionally, this 'precious and wonderful relationship' will be with a partner who will enhance the social status of the family. (p.16) Gladwell is explicit about the family's attitude to skin pigmentation:

Early in our lives skin colour took on meaning for us. My father would have passed for white in England, though not in Jamaica. My mother's skin was smooth chocolate. My sister and I were between them in colour, my brother was like my mother. We had relatives of every shade from black to white. Colour and shade-consciousness was a family affliction. We learnt early on that to be white was very desirable and to be black a misfortune. (p.23)

Marriage to a paler-skinned partner was the desirable means of ensuring that future generations would appear 'white'. The worst scenario was impressed upon the twins: they must not fall prey to any relationship that would result in the ultimate social disgrace of miscegenation, bringing more darker-skinned genes into a family who had 'progressed' by attempts to eradicate them:

It was implicit in our upbringing that we would not identify ourselves with the majority of people round us who lived in concubinage and among whom pregnancy outside a stable relationship was common. But she [mother] often told us of the daughter of a middle-class family who had been seduced by a yard boy. This cautionary tale impressed on us that it could happen to us, but here we felt she went too far. This was the measure of my mother's success in shaping our attitudes, that we thought it unnecessary and insulting to have this story brought to our notice. (p.26)

The 'proper' ambition was achieved in Gladwell's marriage to a white English academic: 'To marry and produce children of a lighter colour than oneself was to "raise" the colour of the family. To raise the colour of the family was to raise its social status.' (p.24) This raising of the Jamaican family status by marriage to a white husband ironically presents itself in inverse relationship to the English family, for whom a 'coloured' daughter-in-law, however refined, proves unacceptable.

Gladwell's marriage to an Englishman was the result of a scrupulous preparation for transfer to English society and university. Other Caribbean writers have taken on this theme as one of the most important sources of their dislocation. Gladwell's version presents a preparation that was achieved by psychological means: by severance of any sense of connection with a negated Jamaican space and by its displacement to an attachment to an acceptable English space. As Warley argues: 'Spatial location also has meaning at the micro level. Spaces "speak". They are coded, meaningful signs. Spaces are permitted or taboo.'⁷⁹ Gladwell's account of the obsessive quasi-Englishness of her school (based on the boarding-school, St Hilda's) is explicit in this respect:

The curriculum was imported from England; the books and subject-matter were English. Even the exercise books were sent from Foyles in London. This only continued what had begun at Harewood, for at that time, even in elementary school, we learnt to read from books prepared for English schools, illustrated with pictures of rolling English wheat-fields and well-clad English children climbing over stiles. In our more advanced readers we had met reproductions of the English painters, Turner and Constable, whose muted colours seemed incredible to our eyes which were so well used to vivid sunshine, contrast of light and shade, and brilliant colours.

Also from England were the spoken accents, the niceties of behaviour and, in spite of the difference in climate, the uniform. When my sister and I began our internment there in 1943, the serge skirts had just been replaced by blue cotton tunics, but some seniors were still wearing black stockings. (p.33)

The subjects of St Hilary's are forced to project their sense of self into some imaginary space elsewhere, where life goes on and is permissible. The narrator continues to explicate the extremes to which this deprivation was taken:

I use 'internment' deliberately. The life of the school, especially for the boarders, was cut off from the town, and indeed from everything around it—from the social and cultural mix of Jamaican life, and from communications with the outside world. We did not read the papers unless we were in the top forms, but perhaps we lost little; the day of the transistor radio was not yet and the school radio set was rarely used. We did not speak to the maids; we did not ask the day girls to bring or buy anything for us. We wrote letters once a week. These could be written to parents, to a brother or to female friends and relatives but to no-one else without specific permission, and the addressed envelopes were checked. (p.33)

Disconnection from the outside world not only negates local culture, but is also self-perpetuating, in effect protecting the residents of St Hilary's from any 'negative' influences. Such dramatic results are achieved by features which resemble the literal 'internment' of a prison regime: limited access to forms of communication with the immediate community; a self-deliberated separation from people with a life outside of the school; censorship of the content and quantity of letters; the projection of an alienated self-image through a hideously inappropriate uniform; and control of the flow of possessions. Gladwell's account is dialogic, and moves between conflicting judgements on the gains and losses incurred by her privileged education: 'I use internment deliberately' and 'but perhaps we lost little'. The adult narrator is never quite able to convince that the isolation was ultimately beneficial and mourns the loss of a Jamaican identity associated here with the eradication of a natural voice: 'The dialect had no place here [St Hilary's]. This is what I looked forward to and what my parents wanted; but when it came to it I had a sense of loss.' (p.33) The dialect was substituted for pretensions in speech that now seem quite bizarre. Gladwell writes of a form of address - they 'learnt how to say "gels" for "girls"' - that Muriel Spark had parodied in 1961 in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*.⁸⁰ But typically, Gladwell

reflects on the consequences of 'rules for everything', at once defending and questioning the same point:

No wonder when I emerged from the school [...] I was like some woodland creature accustomed to living underground, unhappy and unsure in the light and freedom. Yet every one of these restrictions could be justified; I myself have, on occasion, vigorously supported them. How can many live and work together smoothly without some loss of freedom? But could it have been less severe? (p.27)

The author describes this experience as taking place in 1945, a *time of growing nationalism* when scholarships for girls with a 'wholly Jamaican background' were on the increase, and this led to an increasing number of incidents of rebellion. (p.35) However, St Hilary's was spectacularly effective in alienating the girls from Jamaican language and culture, in infusing a sense of English culture, and in feeding the imperative of transfer to an English university. The ritual stripping-away of a Jamaican culture enabled Joyce to be at 'ease in social contacts' on transfer to England. (p.34) The years of conformity, however, created few opportunities for independent thought and judgement. By the time she transfers to England, the narrator professes that she has achieved a certain freedom of choice (between good and evil) and an acceptance of her ancestry, but the route to this understanding has been achieved incidentally in secret acts of rebellion against St Hilary's. These processes ultimately render her confused, vulnerable and unprepared for a bombed-out metropolis.

Faith Nation had transferred to London University on a scholarship two years prior to her twin, and Joyce learns little of what to expect of London from her sister's letters. Faith had joined a group of Christians on arrival in London and had become even more deeply religious. The letters are full of zealous accounts of sermons in Westminster Chapel. The mother is delighted by Faith's new-found associates, but the signal goes out to Joyce that her sojourn in London will involve more 'thou shalt nots', a prospect which causes her 'heart to sink'. (p.65) There seems to be nothing of a practical nature in Faith's letters which might

prepare Joyce for the actual trials that this transfer would present. So Joyce finds herself on a banana boat to London with twenty other passengers including the young son of Marcus Garvey. The only woman at the Captain's table, she is immediately vulnerable to the attentions of the ship's English doctor. She finds herself in his cabin alone, and this naiveté is to result in the following:

I dared not make a dash for the door or resist him for fear of arousing him further - to violence perhaps. Then I remembered a novel I had read from the sixth-form library in which the hero, finding himself alone with his beloved, was completely put off by her coldness. 'I could not take you, Mary,' he said. I proceeded like her to play dead. Quietly but very earnestly I remonstrated. To my astonishment this had no effect. He was completely absorbed in what he was doing and quite indifferent to me.

In that moment I learnt something about the relationship between men and women that I had not allowed for before: that to make love and to love could be quite separate. I had to acknowledge even in my desperation that he was a skilful lover but he had not the slightest regard for my wishes. I have never unlearned that lesson. If the resentment and bitterness passed in time, the sadness still remains. (p.66)

Scarcely away from the protection of her family, Joyce is sexually assaulted. An unavoidable symbolism is perceptible in the ship's passage to England, the transportation of a defenceless 'coloured' virgin, and the assumption by the English doctor that she is but an object for his pleasure. Joyce's account of her distress, and her pragmatic attempt to avoid further violence, is reminiscent of other rapes (of slaves) which, if resisted, often led to violence by ship's officers. St Hilary's curriculum does not include the history of such colonial encounters, nor does it include any advice on managing sexual transactions and the only social register on sexual matters that Gladwell has had access to, a sentimental novel, is dangerously inadequate. It is because of her unfounded assumption that no man would possibly 'take' an unwilling partner - and that she simply has to 'play dead' to discourage unwanted attention - that she allows herself to be alone in the doctor's cabin at all. The novel in St Hilary's library is, typically, bound to Victorian codes of decency that turn out to be the most unreliable of fictions.

Joyce manages to avoid pregnancy by 'the merest accident - an unsuitable time of the month', but she cannot avoid reappraisal of the 'superior' social status conferred on her by St Hilary's. In the light of this experience, she must confront the fact that to the doctor she was simply 'an-easy going coloured girl, no more.' (p.67)

Gladwell arrived in London in 1953, and was plunged into a sea of pallid faces that she found indistinguishable, and into a physical environment which was characteristically grey in comparison to the tropics. Once at London university, she relates various attempts to make friends with her fellow-students but finds that they are a 'community where God is irrelevant'. (p.92) She joins the hockey team and the country-dancing set, but finds them unwelcoming. This she attributes to her lack of enthusiasm for the activities, and, feeling isolated, she turns to her sister's contacts with the Anglican Inter-Varsity Mission. Within this religious group, she finds warmth, and a spiritual and intellectual outlet. She also finds physical solace in the chapel routine of sermons, prayers and social activities that mark the end of the working week. However, as a privately-funded student, she was forced to take a Saturday job on a West Ham market-stall to bolster her allowance. Travelling back to her hall of residence on the tube, she learns to 'glance round fearfully for "Teddy" boys, until I emerged in relief at Russell Square.' (p.69) Dodging the 'Teddy boys' was something that an energetic young student could attempt, but Joyce was more distressed by insults issued when she was least prepared for them and such incidents provoke a strong reaction. At a dinner party, she is wounded by the 'lack of tact and sensitivity' of a senior civil servant who proclaims that 'Colour is class':

I had so far evaded the school encyclopaedia's claim that my colour was linked with obsession with sex, and I thought I had disproved the verdict of arrested intelligence. But here was a new limitation, fixing me till death in my place in society. (p.85)

In the 1950s, the discipline of psychology was undergoing changes which provided a further source of discomfort. At London University, Gladwell finds

herself being lectured by the eminent behaviourist, Professor Eysenck.

Psychology was 'at pains to cut its umbilical link with philosophy' and establish its status as a branch of pure science, but this emphasis on scientific explanations of human behaviour collided with the metaphysics of the Christian faith. (p.80) It was also an inappropriate career option, since as a relatively new discipline, it offered few openings in Jamaica at that time. She would face an additional seven years of training for psychiatry and that would be at odds with other long-held expectations: 'This was an unsuitable profession for a woman, and if I pursued it, marriage would be out of the question.' In consequence, she 'gave up the ambition to be a psychiatrist', and was left with limited career choices and the study of a discipline largely devoid of theological concerns. (p.78)

Having sacrificed career prospects to possible marriage ones, an appropriate choice of partner loomed large. The assault by the ship's doctor had produced a lasting resentment and a determination that there would be no romances with English men, but in spite of this, she fell in love with Graham, the English-born president of the Christian Union. When she visits his family in Kent, she finds them agreeably tuned to her religion, and their familial routine accords exactly with her received notions of Englishness: she is charmed by their walks in the countryside, their gardening in the summer, their teas with scones and preserves, their knitting and reading by the fireside. As good Christians, they are welcoming initially - that is, until the prospect of an engagement is announced:

But later they firmly resisted our engagement: it would be 'wrong' for their son to have a coloured child, 'wrong' for me to have a white child. [...] I knew the objections to a 'mixed' marriage on social and pseudo-scientific grounds, but a moral objection was utterly new and unexpected. (p.95)

In a battle of wills that lasts several months, Graham's parents employ the Bible to justify racial apartheid: 'Had not God "fixed the bounds of the peoples?"' (p.96) Gladwell escapes the heat of the situation by returning to Jamaica, where she finds things reversed. The Nation household accepts the marriage without

question. She is, after all, seen to be 'raising the colour of the family'. Indeed, they may well have been relieved, having anticipated difficulties at finding a suitable marriage partner back home. Her social status, a degree in psychology, and the family's religious beliefs would have narrowed the field in Jamaica.

The couple decide to put their faith in their relationship to the test of time. Gladwell spends the intervening period engaged in educational research at the University College of the West Indies and after eighteen months, Graham's parents relent. The couple are married in London at a teetotal wedding: without any members of the bride's family present. A home with servants, and residence at various equally privileged educational institutions, has not prepared her for the unrelenting drudgery of domestic chores:

I had more practice at Latin unseens than at cooking and I was better at doing them. I found myself on my knees washing the front steps. It was not a picture of myself I liked at all. At home the maids did this sort of job. I was ashamed to find how much it mattered to me to do these menial tasks myself. (p.100)

The couple live in a series of damp flats and Gladwell sinks into depression. She describes the Highgate flat as a prison where her spirit is 'thieved' daily by the alien life and environment: 'I was part dead in a world of walking dead.' (p.101) The Brethren Assembly church at which her husband worships offers little solace. This sombre church silences its women congregationers by a ruling that they are not allowed to lead prayers or hymns: 'The chill drabness I had associated with Bunyan's writing was now my living experience'. (p.103) Before long, she finds herself pregnant, and visits to the hospital render her vulnerable as an object of scrutiny (in much the same way that black and mulatto women were in nineteenth-century Europe). She suffers this 'humiliation' during pregnancy:

But I also knew the indignities and humiliations of being a patient in a teaching hospital: without a 'by your leave', medical students used my exposed body as an object lesson, and I was the subject of a seminar held within my hearing, in which my trouble was referred to as the logical

outcome of malnutrition to be expected in someone from an underdeveloped country! (p.103)

This description of objectification during pregnancy continues a tradition which dates back to the early nineteenth-century in which medical documents represented black females as sexually deviant by the supposed degeneracy of their physiognomy.⁸¹ The 'expert' assessment is determined by the clinician's ignorant assumptions about Gladwell's social status.

The refined subject of the autobiography is unprepared for such nuanced racist encounters and they are a source of great pain at a time when she feels cut off from a world that had validated her sense of self-worth. As the text comes to a close, the narrator reflects on the train of events that has changed her social position: leaving the warmth, peace and quiet of rural Jamaica to fend for herself in 1950s London; her religious isolation from student contemporaries for whom 'God was irrelevant'; the opposition to her engagement; the 'foreignness' of her married life and motherhood - all have contributed to a growing sense of psychological alienation. In despair, she concludes: 'What had become of the person I thought I was - confident and independent? I had become a child again.' Ironically, she had become a child thousands of miles from a mother for whom she had fulfilled every ambition. Contradictory expectations, shifting roles, racist and sexist determinants result in a near mental break-down. She is 'saved' from the brink when Graham gets a lecturing job at the University of West Indies. A return to family, to the sunny climate of Jamaica, and to a part-time lecturing job does much to restore self-esteem and a sense of well-being. But the respite is short-lived, and the ending sees the Gladwells' return, in 1962, to Southampton. With it, returns the constant fear of prejudice and of isolation. It is here that her writing became a survival tool, a source of affirmation and intellectual fulfilment. In a review of *Brown Face*, Andrew Salkey summarised the qualities that enabled Gladwell to finish the autobiography:

Her dynamic instruments in tackling the sweep of her unhappy experiences were the reserves of her deeply Christian background, her individuality in the face of opposition, her sharp intuition and psychological perception of human relations and her restless humour which she applies therapeutically.⁸²

We can now return to the question posed earlier. How is it that Joyce Gladwell, a young and completely unknown West Indian woman, came to publish a full-length autobiography in the late 1960s? As a reader for the American publishers, Dell, put it in 1996: 'considering who she is and when it was written', it is an extraordinary accomplishment.⁸³ There are several factors which contributed to its publication: Gladwell had continuously sought comfort through some form of writing, years away from home had honed her letter-writing skills, and the pleasure she received from this motivated her to write for publication. Nevertheless, I asked her what inspired her to write an autobiography:

I was driven to it by circumstance. I felt isolated in England as a housewife and mother. For the first 5 years of my marriage I had a writing focus as I rewrote 'The Seed Must Die'. When I finished it in 1963 I needed something to take its place. I also felt the need to be heard and understood by people around me, so I determined to write about myself so that my neighbours and in-laws would know who I was.⁸⁴

Narrating her life enabled her to order and account for a period fraught with intense personal conflicts of a cultural, spiritual and material kind. It also enabled her to confront the imperial stereotype with a counter-representation: Gladwell's text provides a reverse discourse on twentieth-century Britain, which becomes the barbarian 'other' of the nineteenth-century anthropologist's record. *Brown Face* is written by the outsider who has been denied a voice, but who has in the process acquired acute observational skills and an understanding of the processes of alienation. Gladwell recognised the importance of her finding a role-model when she confronted the challenge of 'setting the record straight':

We have, until recently, been fragmented in our psyche. Writing comes out of a process of self-recognition and a search for identity and integration. This process began for me when I read Vera Bell's poem 'Ancestor on the Auction Block'. This poem forced me to confront myself. It was a profoundly formative experience in my life and writing. When a few people break ground for others as Vera Bell did for me then writing can begin to flow.⁸⁵

She also had the educational platform, ability and tenacity to see the project through. Her literary precision can be traced to a 'love of using language', fuelled by the encouragement she received from her father, and to the 'writing skills [...] sharpened by teachers who had high standards in the British educational tradition.'⁸⁶ By way of her husband's academic writing, she had made contact with a Christian publisher, Inter-Varsity Press. In the early 1960s, Gladwell rewrote a translation of a Korean autobiography, *The Seed Must Die*, by Yong Choon Ahn. When she came to find a publisher for her own work, Inter-Varsity were the obvious takers, but *Brown Face*'s submission also coincided with some historically significant debates regarding immigration:

The first draft was written between 1963 and 1967. I submitted it to IVP about 1968 and it was accepted. It was a timely book. The wave of Caribbean immigrants to the United Kingdom made the race question an issue in the press, fuelled by the politician Enoch Powell. Among conservative Christians mixed race marriage was a rarity and not encouraged. The book was ground-breaking.⁸⁷

Before submitting the manuscript, Gladwell sent a copy to the University of West Indies, specifically to Mervyn Morris who is a Caribbean critic and a teacher there. She asked Morris for 'critical direction' and his response was encouraging: 'He warmly described it as my "masterpiece", made detailed critical comments and urged me to submit for publication.'⁸⁸ However, on publication, it caused something of a storm:

IVP has a wide distribution system through Christian booksellers in all parts of the world. I received responses from Australia, India, Hong Kong, the Philippines as well as the U.S.A., the United Kingdom and the Caribbean. The book was refused by South African booksellers because of the

presentation of a racially mixed marriage, and refused in Northern Ireland because my sexual encounter with the ship's doctor was considered pornographic. The book was serialised in the Church of England Newspaper in the U.K. and in the *Daily Gleaner* in Jamaica.

I read excerpts from it on the BBC and was interviewed on Southern Television in England.

The 21,000 copies were sold out by 1974.⁸⁹

The book forced readers to confront contentious questions to do with race, immigration, sexual relationships, mixed marriages and religious tolerance of these and this caused discomfort for the establishment. The pious reviewer for *Crusade* articulates this point in 1969:

The book is well written and *helps us to see ourselves as others see us - a not always flattering portrait!* [my italics] Moving incidents jostle with humorous or hurtful ones, and the author's readiness to share, sensitively, her struggles to yield to God the pain and anger she feels at being discriminated against puts us in her debt, for the path of self-surrender is one we all have to tread.⁹⁰

We might deduce that IVP regretted the attention the autobiography received by virtue of the fact that after its 21,000 paperback copies were sold, they chose not to reprint. Not surprisingly, in a year that celebrated the publication of Margaret Drabble's *The Waterfall* and John Fowles' *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, its form and content were unlikely to be of interest to a mainstream publisher and the specialist publisher (IVP) wished to bury it. The work subsequently fell into obscurity and has failed to find a publisher since. In her letter to me, the author explained her frustration at its denial:

IVP chose not to reprint after they were sold out. Since then I have tried unsuccessfully to have the book republished. Extracts from the book were used in teaching materials both at the University of West Indies (Use of English course) and for teachers in training. In spite of this, publishers of Caribbean educational materials such as Collins & Longman have been unwilling to reprint it. Most recently I have tried publishers in the U.S.A. I enclose copies of two responses which exemplify the response of most publishers: we like your writing but we can't guarantee a readership (which will make us a profit).⁹¹

Indeed, the publisher's responses are contradictory: they acknowledge the extraordinary quality and importance of the work, but assert that it would have no potential readership. The following paradoxical response, in 1996, came from the publisher's reader, Cherise Davis Grant, for the New York company Dell:

BROWN FACE, BIG MASTER is by the far the most brilliantly honest memoir I've read in a very long time. Mrs Gladwell's lively yet dignified prose faultlessly illuminates the restrictive boarding school life in Jamaica, her religious and intellectual self-discovery, and the cultural clashes suffered during her life in England. I was surprised that her observations could be so relevant and courageous, considering *who she is* and *when this was written* [my italics].

However, the concern at Dell was two-fold. Firstly, the book was written twenty years ago and will therefore seem dated and incomplete for today's readers. And secondly, the author currently lives in Canada and that the entire memoir takes place in Jamaica and England. Both factors narrow the book's audience considerably and compromise Dell's ability to publish effectively. We are going to have to pass this on.⁹²

It is the reader's assertion that the work would have a potentially 'narrow' audience (a superficial commercial evaluation) which has necessitated the formation of specialist publishers: Virago, Bogle-L'Ouverture, New Beacon and Peepal Tree; all recuperate texts in the knowledge of specific markets with different values.⁹³ However, Gladwell continued to send the autobiography to mainstream publishers, who were bound to respond like this editor from Avon books:

As discussed, I was charmed and moved by Joyce Gladwell's writing, but I just couldn't see a strong external hook to help resurrect it after all these years. It is such an uphill battle to bring out of print books back to life!⁹⁴

Assertions that the work is 'dated and incomplete' and that it needs bringing 'back to life', rest on a notion that this aspect of history is dead and buried, completed elsewhere and unavailable for re-visioning. The publishers' readers' judgements appear to ignore the history of migration and the way in which such patterns have formed modern American society: in other words, an American audience is being

constructed here as something quite separate from its large numbers of Caribbean, Latino and European citizens who would recognise the record of such experience as important. The assertion that such an American readership would not be interested in work set in England and Jamaica ignores a Caribbean diaspora which has scattered family members throughout the world. Indeed, this very phenomenon is traced in the shifting settings of Beryl Gilroy's *In Praise of Love and Children*.

Conversely, Andrew Salkey, noted for encouraging new writers from the Caribbean, was unconcerned either with any embarrassment Gladwell's autobiography might cause or with its commercial potential. In his 1969 review of *Brown Face*, he sets the book in the context of a tradition of marginalised literature and evaluates its contribution to the field:

West Indian writing has to date only three well-known published women writers; Louise Bennett, Ada Quayle and Sylvia Wynter. A fourth is the distinguished historian Dr Elsa Goveia who has published books on West Indian history but has not written either fiction or autobiography. Special attention, then, ought to be paid to the publication of Brown Face, Big Master by Joyce Gladwell. [...]

Joyce Gladwell is a writer of intense feeling and integrity. Her story is engagingly written, well-paced and sincere. It should gain her a substantial readership in Britain and the West Indies. It is hoped that it will be read for its concealed metaphor of the triumph of personal courage in a world becoming, more and more, marked by its absence, and of the power of the individual resourcefulness and action, when everything else fails to work effectively.⁹⁵

Salkey read the work as an existential tract, emphasising the way in which Gladwell uses her literary skills to explore notions of authenticity, agency and resistance to dogma. The substantial readership which Salkey anticipated did not materialise - beyond those readers who happened to purchase a copy on its first print-run. If *Brown Face* were now to be reissued by a specialist publisher, it would facilitate a re-reading of Gladwell's work in the light of postcolonial enquiry, and that re-evaluation might well refute the assertion that the text has been 'dead' for too long. *Brown Face* is an extraordinary example of writing, of

acknowledged quality, in a period where there is a paucity of work by Caribbean women. Unless the text is re-evaluated, it is destined to remain an important, but overlooked, contribution to the account of Caribbean women's experience and expression.⁹⁶

6.5 Iremonger's 'Child in the Rubble': *And His Charming Lady* and *Yes, My Darling Daughter*

Lucille Iremonger, née Parks, was born in Jamaica in 1921, the eldest child of parents of mixed European descent, her Anglo-Scottish father and French mother both being born in the West Indies. The autobiographical *Yes, My Darling Daughter* depicts a rarefied post-plantocracy atmosphere where, as we have seen in the character of Tom in Ashe's *Hurricane Wake*, the instinct for survival appears to develop alongside an abusive streak. Iremonger takes great pains to explain the misfortunes of her family, describing how her mother, a 'Child in the Rubble' of 'The Great Earthquake of 1907', is left orphaned at the age of eight.⁹⁷ Of the family's troubled history, she writes: 'The most casual glance at the more recent upheavals in those family chronicles takes in at least two revolutions, several wars, some catastrophic fires and earthquakes, and much financial ruin.' (p.12)

In Jamaica, Iremonger attended one of the best girls' schools (Wolmers), where, through a combination of hard work and a succession of private tutors, she managed to fulfil her father's expectations that she should win a scholarship to Oxford. She was expected from the outset to be 'finished' in England and to achieve a suitable position as the wife of someone with breeding, power and influence. It was not expected that she should return to marry a Jamaican or contribute to the life of what was regarded by her family as simply a confined and narrow strip of land. Her parents instilled in her no sense of loyalty to her birthplace, and in this respect, she differs from many of the writers of her generation who were fiercely committed to Jamaican nationalism. Indeed, when

she tells her father that she has achieved the ultimate honour as *the* Island Scholarship winner in her year, she receives a simple kiss on the hand and the words 'Go, and don't come back.' (p.196)

Having gained a degree in English Literature, Lucille went on to become the wife of a colonial officer in the South Pacific. She subsequently had a career associated with Conservative politics as the wife of a member of parliament and as a serving member on a county council. She settled in London, and has written and published under the name, 'Lucille D'Oyen Iremonger', describing herself as primarily an 'historical biographer'.⁹⁸ Her autobiographical writing is itself an unusual and complex interplay between her own life story and the family histories and larger political histories that shaped its existence. A combination of positive and negative influences seems to have resulted in a multi-faceted writer, since Iremonger has published work in a variety of genres: fiction, history, biography, and writing for children (see Appendix 5). However, what is curious is that, as a relatively unknown writer, she should have made three attempts at developing an autobiographical style: her first autobiography was published in her mid-twenties in 1948, entitled *It's a Bigger Life*, and she then returned to the autobiographical mode in the 1960s.⁹⁹ *And His Charming Lady* was published in 1961, while *Yes, My Darling Daughter* was published - and favourably reviewed by *The Times Literary Supplement* - in 1964.

What follows is a brief discussion of the neglected corpus of Iremonger's work, with a particular focus on the way in which her autobiographical writing has been ignored. There appears to be no contemporary critical discussion of her work, and we will return to some explanations for this below. Hence, the material remains out of print and unread; some description of it, together with some explanation of its place within this chapter, seems called for. The autobiographical material, in particular, is of relevance to this study for several reasons, since *And His Charming Lady* and *Yes, My Darling Daughter* were published in the early 1960s during that (apparent) lacuna in writing by West Indian women. Although the works appeared earlier than the autobiographies by

Gladwell and Gilroy, the author is synchronous with that generation of writers educated to a now-vanquished 'imperial standard'. It is interesting to read Iremonger, therefore, for her experience of that system, and for the way in which it serviced the grooming of wealthy individuals destined for a particular type of power and success.

And His Charming Lady is not strictly an autobiography but rather a mixture of genres - history, biography and autobiography - in a format which places the author's own life as a wife to a member of parliament alongside some of her more famous predecessors. Having situated herself at the head of a list of 'charming' ladies, each chapter narrates selected episodes from the lives of Lady Caroline Lamb, Lady Charlotte Guest, Mrs Disraeli, Mrs Gladstone, Mrs Millicent Fawcett and Lady Astor. Iremonger's exploration of the demands of political wifedom provides some insight into a stratum of society with roots in the colonies - although, significantly, her work on parliamentary wives omits any mention of her own Jamaican heritage and is presented, as her father would assiduously maintain, as 'merely a geographical accident'. (p.119) However, there is a sense that a background anywhere in the colonies - 'dealing with the natives' - was seen as valuable experience in the 1960s and a fitting apprenticeship for political life, as exemplified by Enoch Powell whose policies were no doubt shaped by his experience as a colonial officer in India. Iremonger's colonial background would have been regarded as an asset in her role as the wife of a Conservative politician, although a somewhat limited one, consisting of her being literally 'shown' on public occasions and holding various positions on select committees. She wielded some degree of influence through her daily contact with the forces of power, but as an M.P.'s wife she had to be cautious, passive and totally supportive of her husband, so that she was often to be found in the childlike position of being seen but not heard. The process of being turned into an object prompts Iremonger to attempt to view herself from the outside, as she imagines she might appear to an inhabitant of 1960s London. A view, she fears,

as someone from an alien past, 'out of step' with contemporary life, and 'useless', in most respects, to her husband's constituents:

To the public eye we often seem, if one is to believe the newspaper gossips, rather unreal survivors of the past, overdressed dolls permanently in the limelight, clutching enormous bouquets, and occasionally giving vent to a few unexceptional but lifeless catch-phrases at prize-givings, horticultural shows, bazaars and fêtes.¹⁰⁰

Iremonger is aware that her position and function are 'unreal' and her growing sense of dislocation - in having contact with a community but no 'place' in it - is evident in the following statement. She is feeling vulnerable, merely an adjunct to her husband on the constituency platform, and faced again with that judgmental gaze: 'I have hardly any children, no Dukes, and suddenly I am nothing, have done nothing, and could only be a handicap to anyone. How did I get here?'(p.15) We only come to understand how she actually got there by reading her (thoroughly researched) third autobiography, *Yes, My Darling Daughter* (1964), which reveals the way in which Iremonger's class-apprenticeship is successful in directing her towards specific aspirations. This work is a meticulous attempt to place Iremonger socially and in history, and to explore the disjuncture between the social world of her upbringing and the one she must try to fit into in contemporary Britain.

As with Gladwell and Gilroy, Iremonger also sometimes finds the outcome of her rigorous education at odds with the subordinate position she is expected to adopt - albeit a very different position. As a white scholarship winner, her societal position is assured but, as the discussion below will explain, she remains subject to the authority of her father and husband. She tells of an intelligent child with a tenacious spirit who might have withered in the care of such a chauvinistic and emotionally bankrupt family but whose spirit is, in fact, directed into her writing where she can free herself to explore and respond to the voices in her head, particularly those of her father's didactic monologues. Iremonger emerges as the carefully nurtured product of a colonial ideology in decline, and her work

therefore makes an interesting comparison with the work of other women writers in this thesis. Iremonger's autobiography yields a no less problematic - but rather an alternative - depiction of the colonial family conflicts which recur throughout the writing of this period, and her contribution thus provides a very different class/race dimension to it.

Yes, My Darling Daughter is a richly textured account which divides into chapters dealing with her upbringing in Jamaica; her research into her ancestry; and, finally, her residence on a remote South Seas island in support of her husband, who was then the district officer. Iremonger's research into her mother's French ancestry is illuminating in several respects - not least, in that it reveals a distinctive part of the history of settlement in the Caribbean. Iremonger is self-confessedly haunted by the 'lost history' of her mother's family, and, in particular, by the deaths of her ancestresses at the hands of French revolutionaries. As the descendent of the aristocratic de Noailles family, she traces their escape from the guillotine of the French Revolution to Haiti. Below she describes the three de Noaille women being prepared for the guillotine, in a way that indicates the importance she attached to detail in her research:

Then the women were handed over to the executioner's men. Officially the famous Sanson, the Chief Executioner, was entitled to only four assistants; but in the summer of 1794 'business' was so brisk and increasing that he had been forced to employ, and pay out of his own pocket, three extra ones. One of them, Desmarets by name, came from an old family of provincial butchers. His particular duty was to supervise the '*toilette*' of the condemned, that is, to cut their hair almost to nape-level, to slash and widen their skirt and dress collars, and to bind their elbows behind their backs. The hair of the dead was reputed to be the perquisite of these men. (p.103)

Iremonger tells of a rather different history of family atrocities to those more usually associated with West Indian writing on slavery, and her Jamaican upbringing is more contiguous with the 'terrified consciousness' of Ashe and Rhys.¹⁰¹ But it may also be read as shedding further light on the thematic concern with the socio-psychological effects that conflicting expectations produced in the

young West Indian women of this generation. The pressures on all three writers in the present chapter are evident, but whilst they all suffer from patriarchal constraints, there is an obvious and fundamental difference between Gladwell, Gilroy and Iremonger. These three finely educated, well-groomed and able young West Indian women suffer differently because of their society's attitude to their colour. Colour is *the* signifier in *Black Teacher* and *Brown Face, Big Master*, and the titles foreground the notion of colour as destiny (in contrast, Iremonger's titles tend to foreground gender subordination). As a white-skinned, well-positioned daughter of European ancestry, she is part of the top stratum of Jamaican colonial society. Consequently, her transfer to London has very different implications for her and her future is more or less guaranteed, although this is not to suggest that Iremonger is expected to have the spoils of success delivered without considerable effort on her own part. Her early life is firmly located within a specific socio-historical moment in Jamaica, and as such, it reveals a vanishing world of expatriates who must strive to maintain a lifestyle under threat. It is a social world full of contradictions: materially luxurious on the one hand, but evidencing emotional deprivation on the other. The Parks family maintain the remnants of tough social processing, excessive corporal discipline, familial alienation and emotional detachment which will ensure that the young Lucille has the necessary 'grit' to fulfil her family's expectations. Much of the autobiography is concerned with vivid descriptions of her parents and her attempts to understand her deeply conflicting emotions towards them. The following extract is typical of her style of narration, and of how she reveals her ambivalence in respect of the rigidity of her father's nationalism. Although the father is a European descendent of several generations of West Indian residents, he clings to a sense of a British nationality. The absolute primacy of all signifiers of 'Englishness' produces the crooked logic that we have also seen in Gladwell's depiction of St Hilary's boarding school:

My father wore English tweeds, as heavy as he could bear in the heat, and heavy English shoes, which he imported. He even took the unusual step of importing English shoes for his daughters. This was quite an undertaking, and when the catalogues arrived from Nottingham we, who were used to the light and pretty American and Continental footwear sold in all the local shoe-shops, could not believe that these shoes for girls of our age could be as heavy and as clumsy and as flat and as round-toed and as brutal as the illustrations made them out to be. [...] When they arrived they were worse than the pictures in the catalogue, and when I first put mine on I felt like a horse with thrush. Later, at the school in the country to which we were sent as boarders, the Scots headmistress, who always wore solid brogues herself, publicly commended my shoes as the only ones in the whole school which were sensible and suitable. It did me no good, either in my eyes or in those of the other girls. Encouraged by this unexpected encomium, I tried to give them away to one or two girls who I thought might like to curry favour with the head; but no one would have them. (p.119)

Having heard Gladwell and others on this subject, we are on familiar terrain with Lucille's despair at the reverence attached to inappropriate items of English clothing and artefacts. But her father goes much further in his denial of any necessity of modifying attitude or appearance to accommodate a West Indian setting:

My father thought of himself always as an English man. The son of an English man and a Scotswoman, the fact that he had been born in a Caribbean island weighed with him not at all. That was merely a geographical accident. This was not an unusual attitude. The children of English parents who were born in India no more considered themselves Indians than do those born in Fiji consider themselves to be Fijians.

My father lived under protest, in an island which was a poor substitute for the country of his soul, and which came the nearer to perfection as it modelled itself the more perfectly on 'home'. (p.119)

That model of 'home' is aptly named 'Breezy Castle', and as an exemplary case of the British abroad, it provides a far from wholesome one. Iremonger's account charts a number of the characteristics that have come to be associated with the dysfunctional descendants of the white plantocracy in the Caribbean. In *Yes, My Darling Daughter*, there are distinct echoes of Rhys's expatriates in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, one obvious similarity being that Lucille's mother manages only a

token relationship with her daughter and very early on repels any imagined need for affection. The descriptions of Lucille's rejections are reminiscent of Antoinette Cosway's mother and her cries to 'let me alone'.¹⁰² Whilst Iremonger reiterates (as if to convince) a deep love for her father, there is no such affirmation with respect to the mother, described as the 'Child in the Rubble'. Typically, she attempts to understand and explain her mother's remoteness, attributing her inability to form relationships to the following:

So my mother was three-fold an orphan - bereft of a mother who was truly dead; orphaned in spirit if not in fact of a father who was dead as if he had been killed by falling masonry or suffocated by fire; and fostered by an aunt who felt for her an icy contempt, before the chill wind of which the breast of the cruel step-mother of tradition seems warm and welcoming by comparison. (p.25)

Iremonger continues to explain how much her mother would have sought the earliest possible relief from this world:

For seven years my mother lived in this sour and repressive atmosphere. At fifteen she was a plump, attractive girl, short with a square head, a magnolia skin and wonderful long hair. She had small hands and feet like her father's and snapping black eyes. A month after her sixteenth birthday she married another orphan, my father. (p.27)

The narrator avoids confronting the painful realisation that her mother was but a child herself on marriage by a textual escape into the construction of a fairy-tale world of beautiful and vulnerable little girls. In this schema, Lucille's father is cast as the dashing Prince who must rescue the defenceless child from her wicked stepmother. The 'wonderful long hair' and 'magnolia skin' may well be suggestive of the mirror-image of Rapunzal or Snow White, but the highly-charged sexualised image of 'snapping black eyes' hints at the mother's instability, coldness, and the possibility of mixed Creole blood. Setting the scene for a fairy-tale escape is a poignant marker that in reality turns out to be all too different. Lucille's mother does not marry a prince, but must make a life with a

man sixteen years her senior and the product of an equally bereft childhood, so that between them they have a less than adequate model of parenting. It is not surprising that a cycle of abuse is repeated with respect to Lucille, who learns to survive in a family which routinely exhibits cruelty to each other: the father to daughter, the mother to daughter and the mother to father. Both parents exhibit, at best, a coldness towards their daughter, and at worst, physical and emotional abuse. This is a lonely child who, like Antoinette in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, is sent to bed in the late afternoon in order that she should not make demands on her parents. She says in a simple one-line paragraph: 'I saw hardly any other children'. (p.35) In a moment of Freudian insight, Lucille casts her mother as a mutilating figure: 'My mother loved knives and always had one close at hand'. (p.34) The following description illustrates the way in which this fetishization of knives appears to the child and results in a lifelong 'fear of the blade': both become symbolic of an event which assumes an enormity in Lucille's life for the way in which it crystallises her mother's hatred. The family has been eagerly awaiting the pomegranate tree to bear fruit, and when it does so, with a single issue, the children expect and hope that it will be shared equally:

Waiting on one foot, tongue out, I watched that plump white hand exercise with surgical precision a section of the seeds, and balance them on the knife blade. My mother slipped this wad of pink seeds daintily between her plump pink lips, and chewed them with evident enjoyment. I could hear her small white teeth crunching them, and feel the saliva in my own mouth as I tasted in sympathy the juices slipping down her throat. Then she cut off a whole segment, and my lips involuntarily opened to receive it. [...] At last I begged. My mother heard, and the shining knife-blade approached me with four pips balanced on its extreme tip. I took them cautiously, in fear of the blade. They were sweet and juicy. I had never tasted anything so wonderful. So I waited, taut as a cat before supper, for the next mouthful. Then the half-empty shell fell to my feet. In a few moments the other half joined it. I had had my share; and so had all the rest of the family. Disbelievingly I looked down at the clean empty shells which my mother had thrown down.

What did it matter that a small child had not had a few more pips from a pomegranate cut by its mother and enjoyed alone by that mother when the whole family had looked forward to tasting it? Why, nothing. Everything. (p.35)

Here the pomegranate functions as a symbol of the mother's sexual pleasure, her fertility, and her independence, which, we later learn, was not to be replicated in Iremonger's marriage. She speaks of her mother's early and successful rebellion at her husband's attempts to control her. One of the ways in which this manifests itself is in a series of unconcealed sexual liaisons which she uses to humiliate him. Just as she flaunts her selfishness with respect to the fruit, she also flaunts her affairs to the embarrassment of her husband:

Naturally my mother's *affaires* were not all conducted at a distance or by correspondence. Her conquests were openly acknowledged, and the admirer of the moment entertained in our house. (Later the advent of the motor car made my mother more mobile).

Every now and then an outraged wife was driven to protest as my mother's heavy paw came down on her husband, and she called at Breezy Castle to complain to my father at her casual depredations. Though not a little embarrassed, he accepted these situations with a remarkable aplomb and phlegm, regarding them no doubt as part of the price one had to pay for marrying into a family which ran to *femmes fatales*. (p.63)

With little actual control of his humiliation by wife, her admirers and their jealous spouses, the husband displaces his frustration by means of a brutal physical control of his children, his staff and his pets.

We might assume from his wife's obvious hatred of him, and from her affairs, that she has withdrawn from him sexually. This results in an attempt at possession of his daughter, and there are hints at some level of sexual abuse by the father. Lucille, as the eldest, seems to incur the worst of his obsessions and is expected to 'perform' for him in various capacities. She must succeed academically, in order to supply a need to brag to 'his cronies at the Yacht Club who had long heard his theories of education', but she must also be beautiful like her mother. (p.135) Ironically, the child has developed a horror of being considered excessively beautiful having grown up observing a mother who uses her beauty to inflict pain. Lucille is entered, against her will and by means of an elaborate deception, in what she sees as a humiliating class-ridden beauty

competition where she will be appraised as a 'young filly'. She only manages to escapes this public trauma, and what she perceives as her parents' betrayal of her wishes, by a last-minute dash from the Myrtle Bank Hotel where the competition final is taking place. This is an extremely rare example of Lucille's rebellion against her father's wishes, since generally she seeks to please him in a constant attempt to gain his approval. She relates how her father manipulates the child's need for love and administers a subtle form of cruelty, characterised by changing the rules of engagement and a withdrawal of the expected reward. This is well-illustrated below in Lucille's memory of her receiving the news that she has won the prestigious scholarship for an English university place, and for which she has competed with the brightest and best of the entire Caribbean. The news breaks at school, but it is her hated mother, not her father, who comes to collect her for lunch. This unexpected displeasure is heightened by the fact that the mother arrives in the school hall with her constant companion, Major Fairfax. Lucille desperately wants her father's approval, but instead, has to endure a return to the scene of humiliation:

I had expected, without giving thought to it, to go home, walk into my old life, throw my books on a chair, and wait for my father to express to me his satisfaction. I knew that I had given him the present he wanted from me, that we had both, in a way, worked for all my life. For myself I had no doubt that the future would all be good. He had said so.

Now, however, my mother and Major Fairfax were waiting for me in the Hall. I found them there, looking out of place, he very large and she very small beside him, but both dwarfed by the big, high, familiar room. There was something strange in receiving congratulations from the Major before anyone else, though he thumped me on my back heartily and seemed genuinely pleased. The thing, I felt, did not come properly within his province.

They had come to take me to the Myrtle Bank Hotel, scene of the beauty competition, for a celebratory lunch. This was the hotel of which the capital was proudest, and my mother and the Major were its regular patrons. That day we sat under a leafy pergola, at a table close to the sea, watching the scarlet and blue Macaws which were chained nearby as an ornament and an entertainment, and eating delicious food. [...] I wondered where my father was, whether he knew, and how, if he did, he felt. Why had he not joined us?

It was lunch-time and he came home to lunch every day. Was he eating at home alone?

When I was at last taken home he was not there. It was not until six o'clock that I was able to confirm that he was pleased. (p.141)

And so, instead of the warm glow of satisfaction that this child might have expected to experience after such a result, Lucille suffers embarrassment and anxiety: her father is absent and she has no idea where he is, and there is a displacement of him by her mother's lover. The choice of the Myrtle Bank Hotel, with its unpleasant associations for Lucille, provides the venue for a celebration which has more to do with her mother and Major Fairfax's habit of extravagant luncheons than in finding a fitting reward for Lucille. And so it is that her success is manipulated and exchanged like a spoil in the unspoken war between her parents which hangs like a cloud over the child's horizon.

Given the confusion that Lucille experiences with respect to her parents, the father as authority figure is, not surprisingly, the source of complex emotions. Lucille's reminiscences are clotted with desperate attempts to understand her love/hate for him and the writing substitutes for a real dialogue that she must have longed for. Instead, she interrogates the text with questions as to whether his cruelty was as a result of the 'cruel, flagellating lot' imported from England to administer his own education, and further speculates: 'Or was it the bullying he endured at his brother's hands?' (p.45) She cannot ignore the obvious anxiety: 'Or was it, yet again, a hereditary strain of cruelty? Who really knows about such things?' She must try to understand how he can erase the faultlines between pleasure and pain with a characteristic unpredictability - as exemplified in many accounts, of which the following is one of the most explicit:

At the best, observing him in his daily life, he [an outside observer] might have found it hard to decide whether he was a kind man with a streak of cruelty or a cruel man with a streak of kindness.

Why was this? Why was my father such a martinet, such a disciplinarian, such a tormentor of dogs, a teaser of little children, a dominator of

subordinates, when at other times he was the most affectionate of fathers, the gentlest of pet-owners, the most considerate of employers?

Certainly he not only beat long and loud and often, confessedly delighting in the feel of the cane and its sound and the satisfaction of punishment, but his sole idea of paternal fun was to tickle his girl children until they screamed with terror and lost their breath entirely. He never played any other game except the variant, horrible one of Spiders, in which he made a spider of his long bony fingers, which travelled with awful deliberation from the tips of one's toes and up and over one's shins, knees and thighs, up and up, with accompanying ghoulis commentary in sinister tones, until it reached one's ribs and the dreaded tattoo of tickling and screams of high laughter exploded with suddenness and force. It is easy to see where my lifelong dislike of spiders came from. (p.44)

This is a disturbing account, since Iremonger's narration is difficult to read without acknowledging its sexual undertones. She appears to be sublimating suggestions of sexual abuse which are also implicit in the descriptions of the relations between brother and sister in *Hurricane Wake*. Typical of Caribbean writing of this period, a taboo on the discussion of all forms of sexuality meant that Iremonger could only gesture towards an understanding of behaviour which we now might recognise as going beyond the boundaries of affectionate play or parental discipline. The confessed gratification to be achieved in the 'long, loud and often' caning of the little girls suggests a paraphiliac tendency.¹⁰³ This is reminiscent of Joan Riley's later and much more explicit account of similar behaviour in *The Unbelonging*, where the protagonist Hyacinth also suffers a similar form of 'discipline' at the hands of her outwardly ineffectual father. Riley goes on to depict an incestuous relationship which also begins with caning and the child's association of her father's savage beatings with an inexplicable bulge in his trousers.¹⁰⁴ Likewise, the dreaded game of 'Spiders' seems also to encode the displacement of pleasure obtained through inflicting pain - the only 'game' he plays, significantly with his 'girl children', building into a quasi-sexual climax of terror for the child and obvious release for the adult.

The above illustrates very well the nature of Lucille's problematic relationship with her father more generally. Significantly, both her autobiographies have titles

which fix their author's identity within a subordinate role, and both indicate the nature of the subordination by use of a possessive pronoun: as '*his*' lady in *And His Charming Lady* and '*my*' daughter in *Yes, My Darling Daughter*. This might be interpreted as unremarkable in pre-feminist consciousness in the early-1960s and as perfectly acceptable by the (then) conventional standards but what is interesting, and in danger of being lost sight of, is the signal that all is far from acceptable: that Betty Friedan's 'problem with no name' is beginning to be articulated, as encoded in work such as Iremonger's.¹⁰⁵ Women's identity crises and their attempts to escape from subordinate roles are iterative in work from this period, so that, in a similar way, Gilroy's title also reflects the problematic relationship she had with her predetermined role as the first 'Black Teacher'. For Iremonger however, both her accounts witness the struggle to claim a meaningful and independent identity outside the patriarchal realm of marriage and home. Powerless as she might appear in the face of social convention, that position is compensated for through the act of writing. As we have seen so often before, the writing becomes the key to survival: of abuse, of sublimation, of denial. Even her political conservatism, and the subordinate role she must adopt as part of that ideology is shot through with a plaintive note. In *And His Charming Lady*, Iremonger repeatedly issues a cry of despair: 'What does she do?' followed by 'What does she do then?' (p.12). It is striking how often her autobiographical 'I' alternates with 'she', implying that the focalisation takes on an estranged point-of-view. She seems to be obsessed, not with her own feelings, but with how she might be judged by an outsider. On one level, Iremonger appears to be celebrating her role as an M.P.'s wife, but her experience is represented as dichotomous. Having achieved her place in society largely through breeding, education and ability, the wife is faced with an unexacting routine. The rigorous education, social, moral and intellectual, that she took such pains to acquire is largely wasted in her daily regime (although not in her writing where she is able to employ a high level of eloquence and erudition in claiming an autonomous voice). The triviality of her problem-solving concerns is evident in the following

quotation, and is typical of the tone and content of the opening pages of *And His Charming Lady* (the situation is difficult to take seriously now as a genuine dilemma, and we might imagine how ironic this 'problem' would appear to be to a wife from a poorer class):

Most Tory wives I know are manacled to their children, and their milk-money goes to pay their nannies (if they can get them) in order to free them for their honorary duties in the constituencies. The problem of dress faces them, it is true, as it faces M.P.'s wives of all parties who are active in the constituencies. [...] What does an M.P.'s wife wear when she has to leave at 9 am (in the rush hour) to reach a 'coffee morning' in the constituency at 11, see over a coal-mine or a trawler at 12, speak at an Inner Wheel luncheon at 1.15, attend a windswept gymkhana at 2.30, visit a mental hospital's psycho-therapy ward at 4, drop in at a cocktail party at 6, grace a football club dinner at 7, support her husband at a rather rough political meeting at 8.30, finish up at an evening dress-and-decorations ball?

Does she plump for an all purpose black jersey dress with different accessories throughout, or, by changing in the back of a car in a lane, risk her husband's arrest for indecency? (A severe political hazard.) (pp.10-11)

We read the above in the knowledge that the Labour Party was about to come to power with Harold Wilson as its leader, and that a new intelligentsia was emerging which preferred to promote the possibility of a classless society, so that it is not surprising that Iremonger sensed she might be regarded as a member of a threatened species.¹⁰⁶ Equally, some of Iremonger's West Indian contemporaries in Britain were being very vocal on the other side of the race/class divide. 1964, the year of publication of *Yes, My Darling Daughter*, was also the year of dynamic black civil rights activity when Claudia Jones organised a march on the US Embassy in London and met with Martin Luther King. Iremonger's conservatism was clearly operating out of old class alliances which opposed moves toward political innovation and challenges to the status quo, so that her image dilemma is unlikely to have been regarded sympathetically at a time when such women were seen to be shoring up the interests of the privileged. However, a reviewer for the *Times Literary Supplement* found *Yes, My Darling Daughter*

unproblematic in terms of its politics or the weight of unresolved feelings contained therein. Of a text that we can now see to be self-reflexive in the extreme, the *TLS* review suggests that Iremonger writes out of 'a liberated objectivity', and ends by stressing the warmth, the sympathy and the hardships that the author endured in the exotic South Pacific.¹⁰⁷ Other reviewers who were not quite as positive in their appraisal of her work were apt to receive an admonishment, via a letter to the editor of the *TLS*, from the Right Honourable Mr Iremonger, and we might assume that, in their time, the Iremongers had made some powerful establishment allies.¹⁰⁸

Iremonger's work provides an exemplary study of conservative values and their reiteration and replication. However, viewed as a 'lost' Caribbean woman writer, 'the red-nosed, chap-handed, tweedy figure in squat shoes and a sensible hat' occupies an uneasy class and racial position, and contemporary critics on recuperative projects have turned their attentions elsewhere. (p.10) Iremonger is, in her own words, likely to be seen as a 'rather unreal survivor of the past'. (p.9) In her case, she tells a tale of survival, no less substantial than many others, but one which might be regarded as being on the wrong side of 'political correctness'. Her 'reality', however, is a fruitful area of study: its discourses of power, and of the intersections of race, gender, class and sexuality, reveal how conservative values are maintained and the points at which they fracture. And so, whilst Iremonger's social position would have undoubtedly provided her with easier access to the world of publishing and reviewing in her time, her work is much less likely to be recuperated since it represents a repressive hegemony which voided black history and literature. This propulsion towards reversing the discourse of powerful voices means that she slips through the 'retelling' categories claimed as the new ground - as explicated here by Merle Collins:

Caribbean women's writing tends to be concerned with all that has gone into the shaping of Caribbean societies; colonisation and its consequences, the shaping of slavery and indenture, the meaning or meaninglessness of independence. There is a concern with formation - the formation of the society, formation of the individual - and with reclaiming and revoicing. This

revoicing means a retelling of the story misrepresented by the white male coloniser, a revoicing of perspectives not adequately voiced by the white expatriate woman would-be liberator, a re-writing of perspectives presented by the African-Caribbean and Indian-Caribbean male writer, a re-voicing of perspectives presented by the male Calypsonian in the region, simply a revealing of stories told by mothers, aunts, godmothers, tanties, nenens, so that many of the themes overlap with themes explored by male Caribbean writers.¹⁰⁹

Clearly, a colonial woman writer like Iremonger does not fit into this call for 're-voicing'. Her voice has traditionally been seen as one that has been carried easily by the power and privilege of the plantocracy. But we have seen that her work - as representing a particular, now vanished societal position - is ripe for reassessment. On one level, Iremonger's books provide an important account of the way in which white colonial power determined the difference between a smooth passage into British society in the 1950s and '60s and the psychically destructive one exemplified in the two autobiographies analysed previously. But it does more than reveal the simple social equation of white skin and power, since it resists simplification by providing a chilling exposé of the social processing that was necessary to maintain class, race and gender subordination at the very point at which those processes are about to break down. Iremonger begins *Yes, My Darling Daughter* with this weary admission:

My reason for publishing this rather personal little book is that I have been persuaded [she does not say by whom] that I owe a footnote to history. I was by the accident of my birth placed at the confluence of two cultures, doomed and now vanished but not uninteresting, full of pride, of terrible conflicts and of pathos as they were - that of the English in the West Indies still living in the ethos of a slave-owning oligarchy, and that of the émigrés from the French Revolution. Much is published about the Caribbean today, and it is all no doubt accurate as well as vivid; but the writers tell of a *different* world from the one I knew. (p.9. author's italics)

As we know, by 1964, Britain had an established body of work by male novelists writing on the Caribbean, but Iremonger also writes out of an absence of anything else relating to her experience of that geo-cultural space called the West

Indies. In this respect, she does not differ from her black contemporaries, Gladwell and Gilroy, since they all write out of a need to add to a gendered version of history from which they find themselves excluded. The corrective impulse is shared, although the discourse and the experience is not. Such diversity of perspective brings into view the differences that form an important, but missing, part of the social processes of change that saw the transition from a colonial ideology to a postcolonial one. Iremonger's work may be neglected on the grounds that it speaks for a class and race whose version of the world has traditionally been privileged, but as the product of a Caribbean woman writer, it should be rescued as an instance of a genre of writing in which the conflicts inherent in being born into that position of privilege are exposed.

- ¹ Anne Walmsley's interview transcript with Pearl Connor, 25.2.87, p. 8.
- ² With the possible exception of Sylvia Wynter who may well have arrived in Britain with pre-existing manuscripts which anticipated publication.
- ³ For extracts from Prince and Seacole, see *Daughters of Africa: An International Anthology of Words and Writing by Women of African Descent from Ancient Egyptian to the present*, ed. by Margaret Busby (London: Vintage, 1993).
- ⁴ See *On Freud's 'Creative writers and day-dreaming'*, ed. by Ethel Spector Person, Peter Fonagy, Servulo Augusto Figueira (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).
- ⁵ Joyce Gladwell, *Brown Face, Big Master* (London: Inter-Varsity, 1969), p. 39. All further references are to this edition and appear as page numbers in the text.
- ⁶ Morgan Dalphinis, 'Preface' to *Black Teacher*, rev.edn (London: Bogle-L'Ouverture, 1994), p. ix.
- ⁷ Carmen Vernon, 'Child, You Come at a Bad Time', in *So This is England*, Peckham bookplace (London: Peckham Publishing Project, 1984), p. 7.
- ⁸ See introduction in Louise Shore, *Pure Running: A Life Story* (London: Centreprise, 1982), p. 6.
- ⁹ For example, see author's interview with Dr Jeremy Poynting, Leeds, 15.8.95.
- ¹⁰ In the interview with Federation writer Dorothy Blake, she spoke of an impulse to write and of how she attended night classes in Kingston to improve her literacy skills. On migration to Britain, she described the many obstacles that had prevented her from continuing with the necessary classes. Notes from Author's interview with Dorothy Blake, Stanford Hall, Co-operative College, Loughborough, 5.4.97.
- ¹¹ Roslyn, in *Just Lately I Realise: Stories from West Indian Lives*, Gatehouse (Manchester: Gatehouse, 1985), p. 60.
- ¹² Cloeta, in *Just Lately I Realise: Stories from West Indian Lives*, p. 83.
- ¹³ In *Milk River: Writing from Jamaica and St Lucia* (London: Peckham Publishing Project, 1979), p. 22.
- ¹⁴ Pauline Wiltshire, *Living and Winning* (London: Centreprise, 1985), p. 33.
- ¹⁵ In *Milk River: Writing from Jamaica and St Lucia*, p. 6.
- ¹⁶ In my interview with Dorothy Blake, she also described a similar situation which prevented her from attending school in Jamaica until the age of 11. When she finally began to attend the orthodox Catholic school on a regular

basis, the nuns were far more concerned with her lack of religious instruction than with her poor reading skills. She related how the nuns invested a considerable amount of effort in instruction in genuflection but paid much less attention to her acquisition of basic skills. Notes from Author's interview with Dorothy Blake, Stanford Hall, Co-operative College, Loughborough, 5.4.97.

- ¹⁷ Shore, p. 5.
- ¹⁸ Wiltshire, p. 5.
- ¹⁹ Wiltshire, back cover.
- ²⁰ Note from author's interview with Dorothy Blake.
- ²¹ Jean Rhys, *Tigers are Better Looking* (London: Penguin, 1972; first published Deutsch, 1968), p. 62.
- ²² Author's interview with Rebecca O'Rourke, Middlesborough, 17.6.95.
- ²³ In my interview with Ranjana Ash, she advised me to be critical of accounts which had been solicited by, and edited from, a white western perspective. She also indicated that *The Scarlet Thread* is regarded as highly controversial by South Asian readers who question the representation of what is intended to be a typical Indian's woman's experience from a white woman's point-of-view. Rachel Barton, *The Scarlet Thread: An Indian Woman Speaks: Her Story as told to Rachel Barton* (London: Virago, 1987).
- ²⁴ Carolina Maria De Jesus, *Beyond All Pity: The Diary of Carolina Maria de Jesus*, trans. by David St. Clair, 4th edn (London: Earthscan, 1990; first published as *Quarto de Despejo*, Sao Paulo: Livraria Francisco Alves, 1960), p. 25.
- ²⁵ De Jesus, p. 33.
- ²⁶ David St. Clair, 'Translator's Preface', in *Beyond All Pity*, p. 18.
- ²⁷ Else Ribeiro Pires Viera, 'Can Another Subaltern Speak/Write', *Renaissance and Modern Studies*, 38 (1995), 96-125 (p. 101).
- ²⁸ Claire Buck, ed. *Bloomsbury Guide to Women's Literature* (London, Bloomsbury, 1992), p. 305.
- ²⁹ Buck, p. 305.
- ³⁰ David St. Clair, 'Translator's Preface', in *Beyond All Pity*, p. 11.
- ³¹ Fay Comrie, 'Painting Our Own Portraits', in *When Our Ship Comes In: Black Women Talk*, Chapeltown Black Womens Writers Group (Leeds: Yorkshire Arts, 1992), p. 7.
- ³² Palorene Williams, 'Introduction' in *When Our Ship Comes In: Black Women Talk*, p. 5.

- ³³ Freire is discussed in Riberio (p. 119).
- ³⁴ Ribeiro, p.119.
- ³⁵ 'Grenada', in *Travellers Literary Companion to the Caribbean*, James Ferguson (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 1997), p. 297.
- ³⁶ Chris Searle, *Words Unchained: Language and Revolution in Grenada* (London: Zed, 1984), cited in Ferguson, *Travellers Literary Companion to the Caribbean*, p. 298.
- ³⁷ Shore, p. 38.
- ³⁸ Shore, p. 51.
- ³⁹ Shore, p. 38
- ⁴⁰ Shore, p. 40.
- ⁴¹ Shore, p. 41.
- ⁴² Shore, p. 44.
- ⁴³ I happened to be teaching the Rhys short story at the same time as I was working on Shore's autobiography and I noted a striking similarity between the two narratives. Rhys's short story of 1962 is included in the volume *Tigers Are Better Looking* (pp.44-63). The short story is based on real-life events which led to her imprisonment in the hospital wing of Holloway Prison in London and are described in Carole Angier's biography, *Jean Rhys*, rev. edn (London: Penguin, 1992; first published Deutsch, 1990), pp. 445-448. The experience that Rhys's text recounts, and the manner in which it does so, are eerily close to those in Shore's autobiography, and suggest how common they must have been at this point. The following quotations relate to those from Shore in the text and are offered as evidence of this. 'Let Them Call it Jazz' opens with Selina being wrongfully evicted: 'One bright Sunday morning in July I have trouble with my Notting Hill landlord because he ask for a month's rent in advance. He tell me this after I live there since winter, settling up every week without fail. [...] She say one month in advance is usual, and if I can't pay find somewhere else'.(p.44) When the police are called on one occasion, Selina reacts in the following manner: 'I get vexed the way he speak and I tell him, "I come here because somebody steal my savings. Why you don't look for my money instead of bawling at me? I work hard for my money. All-you don't do one single thing to find it"'. (p.51) Like Shore, Selina is the victim of a predatory male, the pimp, Mr Sims: ' He give me the keys and an envelope with a telephone number on the back. Underneath is written "After 6 p.m. ask for Mr Sims"'. (p. 45) And when she is in the hospital wing at Holloway, Selina, like Shore again, refuses food and retreats into silence: 'Twice the doctor came to see me. He don't say much and I don't say anything.' (p.60) While I recognise that Rhys's text is a carefully constructed story, in which she elects to use this narrative

voice from amongst others available to her, and that Shore's is not at all self-consciously literary (her 'voice' is indeed her own - and her only - one), I was struck by the way a comparison of the two texts raises questions about the security of definitions of what comprises 'literature' and what does not.

- ⁴⁴ In *Milk River: Writing from Jamaica and St Lucia*, p. 24.
- ⁴⁵ See Jim McGuigan, *The State and Serious Writing: Arts Council Intervention in the English Literary Field*, unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Leicester, 1984, p. 232. This thesis presents an analysis and discussion of the implications of state intervention and its relationship to 'serious' writing. McGuigan finds that: 'The circularity of the discourse of "serious" writing is quite dizzying. It is virtually impossible to interrupt this interplay of shared and unexamined assumptions without calling the whole notion into question.' p.220. McGuigan observed at Arts Council meetings to determine funding and reveals these in a chapter which goes into some detail on the Federation's bid for funds and the committee's (chaired by Melvyn Bragg) response. pp.223-244.
- ⁴⁶ Author's interview with Nick Pollard, Sheffield, 18.8.95. See Appendix 3.4, transcript, p. 312.
- ⁴⁷ Author's interview with Pollard, p. 312.
- ⁴⁸ Simon Dentith, 'Contemporary Working-Class Autobiography: Politics of Form, Politics of Content', *Prose Studies*, 8.2 (1985), 60-80 (p. 61).
- ⁴⁹ Current catalogue for Centreprise Publishing Project, 1992.
- ⁵⁰ Shore and Wiltshire are included in the 'Autobiography' section of the current Centreprise catalogue and are available by mail-order from Centreprise Publishing Project, 136/137 Kingsland High Street, Hackney, London, E8 2NS.
- ⁵¹ Prahbu Guptara, *Black British Literature: An Annotated Bibliography* (London: University: Dangaroo, 1986), p. 23.
- ⁵² E.R.Brathwaite, *To Sir, With Love*, 9th edn (London: Coronet, 1993; first published Bodley Head, 1959), back cover blurb.
- ⁵³ Beryl Gilroy, *Black Teacher*, rev.edn (London: Bogle-L'Ouverture, 1994; first published Cassell, 1976), back cover blurb. All further references to this edition appear as page numbers in the text.
- ⁵⁴ Guptara, p. 23.
- ⁵⁵ This comment was made during a telephone discussion with Dr Gilroy, 22 February 1996.

- ⁵⁶ Beryl Gilroy, 'I write because...' in *Caribbean Women Writers: Essays from the First International Conference*, ed. by Selwyn R. Cudjoe (Wellesley: Calaloux, 1990), pp. 195-201 (p. 199).
- ⁵⁷ *The Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th Edition, 1910 - 1911, pp. 344 -348, is cited in Joyce Gladwell, *Brown Face, Big Master*, pp. 53-54.
- ⁵⁸ Cudjoe, p. 199.
- ⁵⁹ The 1965 Act legislated against racial discrimination in the community, such as the discriminatory exclusions that had regularly operated in pubs, clubs, restaurants, on buses and in parks. The 1965 Act also made illegal the charge of 'Deliberate incitement to racial hatred'. Signs that were common in the 1960s - for example 'Vacancy. No blacks need apply' - were legislated against in 1968. The 1976 Race Relations Act outlawed indirect discrimination, such as the setting of conditions of employment that were, in effect, discriminatory.
- ⁶⁰ Lionel Morrison, 'It's like a mini UN at Beckford Infants' School', *Evening Standard*, 5 October 1973.
- ⁶¹ The main recommendations were summarised in the *Times Educational Supplement*, 29 May 1981. See 'Racism and Schooling', in *Racism in the workplace and community*, (Milton Keynes: The Open University, 1984).
- ⁶² Cudjoe, p. 199.
- ⁶³ Renu Jeneja, 'Uses of History' in *Caribbean Transactions: West Indian Culture and Literature* (London: Macmillan, 1996) , p. 119.
- ⁶⁴ Edward Blishen, 'A Hard School', *The Guardian*, 22 July 1976, p.16.
- ⁶⁵ Roy Blatchford, 'To Miss... with love', *The Times Educational Supplement*, 27 August 1976, p. 16.
- ⁶⁶ Blatchford, p. 16.
- ⁶⁷ Reva Klein, 'No Grey Areas', *The Times Educational Supplement*, 29 July 1994, p. 15.
- ⁶⁸ Klein, p. 15.
- ⁶⁹ Jeneja, p. 118.
- ⁷⁰ See Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (London: Routledge, 1978) and Mary Douglas, *Implicit Meanings* (London: Routledge, 1975).
- ⁷¹ Cudjoe, p. 196.
- ⁷² Buck, p. 578.
- ⁷³ Guptara, p. 25.
- ⁷⁴ Guptara, p. 24.

- ⁷⁵ There are brief entries on Gladwell in Guptara and Herdeck, but otherwise her work is absent from bibliographies. The only critical attention I have been able to trace is in 'The Treatment of Mixed Marriage in Selected Works by George Lamming, Frank Hercules and Joyce Gladwell', by Roxiline Morrison-Spence, unpublished Master of Arts thesis, University of West Indies, Mona, 1988.
- ⁷⁶ I am indebted to Dr Bridget Jones for employing her extensive Caribbean network to help me trace Joyce Gladwell's brother to an address in Jamaica. It was he who passed on my letter to the author in Canada.
- ⁷⁷ Walmsley, *The Caribbean Artists Movement*, p. xvii.
- ⁷⁸ Linda Warley, 'Locating the Subject of Post-Colonial Autobiography,' *Kunapipi*, 15.1 (1993), 23-31 (p. 24).
- ⁷⁹ Warley (p. 25).
- ⁸⁰ In *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (London: Macmillan, 1961), Muriel Spark satirises a Scottish private girls school where the protagonist, Miss Brodie, speaks to her 'gels'.
- ⁸¹ See Sander Gilman, 'Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward An Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth Century Art, Medicine and Literature', in *Race, Culture and Difference* eds. James Donald and Ali Rattansi (London: Sage, 1992). pp. 171-198.
- ⁸² 'Brown Face, Big Master', book review by Andrew Salkey, *Caribbean Magazine*, No. 21 (1969), [n.p].
- ⁸³ Letter to Tina Bennett of Janklow & Nesbit Associates from Cherise Davis Grant of Dell publishers, New York, 22 July 1996.
- ⁸⁴ Gladwell responded in writing to the questions contained in Appendix 1.3. This was her reply to question 6. Letter to the author, 22 November 1996.
- ⁸⁵ Response given to my question number 11.
- ⁸⁶ Letter to the author, 22 November 1996.
- ⁸⁷ Letter to the author, 22 November 1996.
- ⁸⁸ Letter to the author, 22 November 1996.
- ⁸⁹ Letter to the author, 22 November 1996.
- ⁹⁰ Anonymous book review in *Crusade*, June 1969, 28.
- ⁹¹ Letter to the author, 7 November 1996.
- ⁹² Letter to Dell from Cherise Davis Grant.
- ⁹³ Publishers who specialise in recuperation are subject to even greater financial constraints than their mainstream contemporaries. Virago has struggled to

survive financially. Nevertheless, in the 1980s, Virago rescued some notable examples of Caribbean women's work which were otherwise destined for the type of obscurity which is accorded to *Brown Face*. In 1984, they published *Luminous Isle* (1934) by Eliot Bliss which had been unavailable for 50 years; while Phyllis Shand Allfrey's *The Orchid House*, first published in 1953, remained out of print until Virago's recovery of it in 1982.

Bogle-L'Ouverture rescued the 1976 autobiography *Black Teacher* from obscurity with its reprint in 1994, breaking an intervening silence of 18 years. Peepal Tree Press provides an outlet for new Caribbean writing and writing that has lacked a sympathetic publisher.

- ⁹⁴ Letter to Tina Bennett at Janklow & Nesbitt associates from Charlotte Abbott, Editor of Avon Books of New York, 27 June 1996.
- ⁹⁵ Andrew Salkey, *Caribbean Magazine*, No. 21 (1969), [n.p].
- ⁹⁶ Gladwell works as a family therapist in Canada and continues to write as a free-lance journalist. She has written a second autobiography which has never been published. In the 1970s, she contributed a chapter to a book on Christian Feminism, *Our Struggle to Serve*, ed. by Virginia Hearn. She is currently writing a chapter for a book on marriages that last more than 25 years.
- ⁹⁷ Lucille Iremonger, *Yes, My Darling Daughter* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1964), p. 12. All further references are to this edition and appear as page numbers in the text.
- ⁹⁸ Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert and Olga Torres-Seda, *Caribbean Women Novelists: An Annotated Critical Bibliography* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1993), p.89.
- ⁹⁹ She describes her first work, published by Hutchinson in 1948 and entitled *It's a Bigger Life*, as covering 'the same geographical territory' as *Yes, My Darling Daughter*. The latter work is, however, deemed by the author to be a 'journey of the soul not the body'. See *Yes, My Darling Daughter*, p. 9.
- ¹⁰⁰ Lucille Iremonger, *And His Charming Lady* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1961), p.9. All further references are to this edition and appear as page numbers in the text.
- ¹⁰¹ Kenneth Ramchand, *The West Indian Novel and its Background* (London: Faber & Faber, 1970), p. 223.
- ¹⁰² Jean Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, (London: Penguin, 1968; first published Deutsch, 1966), p .17.
- ¹⁰³ Lucille's father would appear to be manifesting some of the symptoms of a paraphiliac, especially one with sadistic tendencies. His pleasure at administering pain is clear enough from other accounts in the autobiography. Paraphilia is defined by the American Psychiatric Association Manual as

unusual and bizarre behaviour involving sexual activity with non-consenting adults or children, particularly one where gratification is obtained from inflicting pain. (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, DMS -111, 1980). I acknowledge the expert direction of Dr Carolyn Hicks, Reader in Healthcare Psychology, in obtaining this reference.

- ¹⁰⁴ Joan Riley, *The Unbelonging* (London: Womens Press, 1985).
- ¹⁰⁵ Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (London: Penguin, 1963).
- ¹⁰⁶ See Robert Hewison, *Too Much: Art and Society in the Sixties, 1960-1975* (London: Methuen, 1986) p. 61. Christopher Booker called 1963 'The year of the death wish', in *The Neophiliacs* (London: Collins, 1969).
- ¹⁰⁷ Anonymous reviewer, 'Her Islands Story', *Times Literary Supplement*, 12 November 1964, p. 1022.
- ¹⁰⁸ Letters to the editor appeared from Lucille Iremonger's husband in the *Times Literary Supplement* in response to unfavourable reviews of *Love and the Princess*, in 1958 (p.689) and of *How Do I Love Thee*, 24 December 1976 (p.1613).
- ¹⁰⁹ Merle Collins, 'Framing the Word: Caribbean Women's Writing' in *Framing the Word: Gender and Genre in Caribbean Women's Writing* ed. by Joan Anim-Addo (London: Whiting and Birch, 1996), pp. 4-11 (p. 8).

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION: 'SHE WROTE IT, BUT...'

She didn't write it.

She wrote it, but she shouldn't have.

She wrote it, but look what she wrote about.

She wrote it, but 'she' isn't really an artist and 'it' isn't really serious, of the right genre - i.e. really art.

She wrote it but she wrote only one of it.

She wrote it, but it's only interesting/included in the canon for one limited reason.

She wrote it, but there are very few of her. (Joanna Russ, *How to Suppress Women's Writing*, p.76.)

At the beginning of this project, I was unable to name a single Caribbean or black British woman author. Now, in writing the conclusion, I am in a position to reflect on those women writers of the preceding chapters who were lost to me in the course of my literary studies. The prime objective of this thesis has been achieved: that is, the recovery of 'lost' writing from the 1960s and '70s, together with attempts to explain West Indian women writers' choices of form, the conditions which stimulated them to write for publication, and where relevant, why the work has fallen into obscurity. However, this study has been equally concerned with exploring the myth that would tell us that women's absence from literary histories is because women were not writing *at all* in the period under consideration. The search was premised on the belief that women always write something, in some form, somewhere. In the course of their lifetimes, the authors presented in this thesis might have incurred any one, and sometimes more than one, of Joanna Russ's 'truisms' cited above. However, the prevailing myth of this period of literary history is that women, constrained by racial, gendered and class-based consciousness, were not writing - in other words, that she 'wasn't' there because 'she didn't write it'. By way of conclusion, I return to the ten themes (cited on pp. 21-22 of the introductory chapter), which were sometimes

offered to explain why in general, women were not writing in the 1960s and '70s, in order to suggest how accurate such 'explanations' remain in the light of the work presented in the succeeding chapters.

The first 'theme' explains the paucity of writing by 'ordinary' West Indian women by way of the assumption that the majority either finished their education in early adolescence or missed out on primary education altogether, resulting in an insufficient level of literary skills to write to a mainstream publication standard. It is clear that this is valid in respect of first- and second-wave migrants who were educated in the colonial West Indies, and might apply equally to men and women. Poor levels of education for African-Caribbean, Indo-Caribbean and Chinese children presented a major barrier to their being able to write novels and sustained pieces (although education provision in countries like Guyana expanded after independence, producing writers such as Janice Shineborne). But we have noted that the earlier generation of West Indian women were far from passive, and responded to their voicelessness and cultural alienation by joining the adult-literacy groups of the Federation. Chapters 5 and 6 present work by writers which illustrates, over and over again, their authors' quest for literacy skills that would at once enable them to function in British society but which would also allow them to write poetry, short fiction, and their life-stories. The fact that the writing listed in Appendix 5.4 - for example, Shirley Cooper's *Memories From Home*; Peckham Bookplace's *So This is England*; Hackney Reading Centre's *Every Birth it Comes Different*; and Gatehouse's *Just Lately I Realise* - was published at all suggests the importance the authors attached to seeing their work in print, and therefore available to other working-class readers and writers. However, as we have seen, community publications normally remain of value only to their originating constituencies: such work rarely receives the attention of literary critics and literary historians, hence explaining its absence from scholarly accounts of literary and cultural developments.

A related point, offered by the second theme, cites the obvious fact that many 'ordinary' West Indian women migrants did not write because their struggle to

settle in a hostile country absorbed all their energies. My interviews with Melvina McKenzie and Dorothy Blake reveal the impossibility of their attending literacy classes or writers groups, because economic necessity often saw them fully occupied in child-care during the day and factory shift-work during the evening. However, the case of Dorothy Blake, cited in Chapter 7, also illustrates that the creative impulse to write did not dissipate over the years in which she lacked the opportunity to write. Other examples indicate that even the most difficult material circumstances did not necessarily prevent certain women from writing: indeed, as the cases of Carolina Maria de Jesus, Louise Shore and Pauline Wiltshire suggest, their need to write was fuelled by distress, separation, poverty and subjugation. As we have also seen amongst Federation writers who had been educated to a good standard of literacy - for example Caroline Williams, the St Lucian writer discussed in Chapter 2 - their downward class positioning stimulated them to write out of an acute sense of 'unbelonging'.

Whilst material circumstances might easily prevent working women from acquiring a time, a space and the skills to write, theme number 3 denies the existence of the *impulse* to write in the majority of 'ordinary' West Indian women. The volume of Federation materials might suggest that writing was a much more universal activity than it actually was: indeed, my interview with Melvina McKenzie corroborated this explanation, in the sense that writing for pleasure was not an option for first- and second-wave women whose prime concern was providing a high standard of parenting and moral guidance in a threatening environment. But many years later, when their children had been seen safely into adulthood, some women demonstrated a need to record their earlier experiences in collections such as The Chapeltown Black Women Writers' *When Our Ship Comes In* (1992) and The Gloucester Elders' *A Long Five Years* (1995). Both texts illustrate the importance of the church as an expressive space in the early years of settlement for women who devoted their energies to laying down the foundations - cultural, educational, material and spiritual - for their children's future.

A commonly reiterated explanation (theme 4) for West Indian women's absence in literary histories, prior to the 1980s, concerns women's centrality to an oral culture with no tradition of, or need for, written forms of expression. But if we accept that the oral tradition militates against a written form then it should equally affect West Indian men who, of course, write out of the same oral tradition in work such as Andrew Salkey's *Anancy's Score* (Bogle-L'Ouverture, 1973) and *Dread Beat and Blood* by Linton Kwesi Johnson (Bogle-L'Ouverture, 1975). In fact, Chapter 5 has argued that the oral tradition is inseparably fused with European *literary* models, for example, in the work of the female *Caribbean Voices* writer Barbara Ferland. Chapter 5 also explained that it was Louise Bennett who actively challenged the European literary heritage by writing and performing exclusively in a vernacular tradition of comic story-telling. Bennett's status as a writer, in the early years, suffered from the division between 'real' and 'folk' literature, and her work was dismissed by one of Russ's axioms: 'She wrote it, but "she" isn't really an artist and "it" isn't really serious'. Thereafter, Bennett's work provided the precedent for dub poetry-performers like Valerie Bloom, Jean Binta Breeze and Amryl Johnson, with its irreverence for a standardised English voice in European poetic forms. Chapter 5 also considered what might happen to women writers from the Caribbean whose migration severed them from communal forms like folk ballads and story-telling, and argued that a work such as *Captain Blackbeard's Beef Creole and other Caribbean Recipes* recorded - probably for the first time *in writing* - stories, recipes and instructions that would have normally been passed down through the oral tradition. Indeed, it appeared that it was this very severance from an oral culture that provided the impetus to record in writing what might otherwise be lost. As Jessica Huntley pointed out, West Indian women had been traditionally the guardians of an oral culture, but some of those guardians clearly recognised the need to transfer the oral into the written in order to survive the pressures - globalisation of culture, loss of identity, historical amnesia of social roots - of the contemporary diaspora.

The fifth 'theme' concerns those West Indian women who came to Britain to further their education (graduate, postgraduate and professional), and who it is said, undoubtedly had the educational basis and material circumstances to compose sustained pieces of writing, but were too absorbed by the need to produce Caribbean-focused scholarship to consider *creative* work. This argument is supported by many instances of exemplary scholarship originating in the 1950s, '60s and '70s by women such as Elsa Goveia - who published *A Study of the Historiography of the British West Indies to the End of the Nineteenth Century* (Mexico City: Instituto Panamericano de Geografica e Historia, 1956) - Erna Brodber, Merle Hodge, Maureen Warner Lewis, Lucille Mathurin Mair, Marjorie Thorpe, Linda Robeson and Sylvia Wynter, all of whom made significant contributions to new fields of research (some of these are detailed in Walmsley's 'Select Bibliography' in *The Caribbean Artists Movement* and exemplified in the essays by those authors in *Jamaica Journal* and *Savacou* 13). However, Brodber's academic writing, for example, also led to the first of several celebrated novels; *Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home* (New Beacon, 1980) being inspired by her research for a socio-psychological case-study. We also know that Hodge wrote *Crick Crack, Monkey* in the late-1960s whilst she was a postgraduate student working on Léon Damas in London. Both cases suggest that the activities of scholarship and creative writing relate to, and stimulate, each other in some instances.

Some highly-educated and gifted West Indian women held positions of leadership in the turmoil which followed phases of independence in the Caribbean and in the organisation of resistance to racism in Britain - theme number 6 suggesting that their political involvement militated against their production of creative writing. Evidence cited in Chapter 3 endorses this argument that women's political commitment took precedence over, and often delayed, their personal expression. Notable examples are Merle Collins, Merle Hodge, Judith Laird and Pauline Melville and their respective labours towards the revolutionary movements in Cuba and Grenada. Additionally, women's

involvement in publishing, itself a form of political activism for Phyllis Shand Allfrey, Claudia Jones and Jessica Huntley, diverted their energies away from personal creative projects.

The credibility of theme number 7 - that gender politics helped to suppress the writing and/or publication of work by women during the 1960s and '70s - is possibly the most difficult to ascertain, since while virtually every respondent in this study mentioned this theme - finding a way of pinpointing how this actually worked in practice has proved challenging. For example, this research has discovered several instances where West Indian men were instrumental in bringing women's work to publication: Andrew Salkey was supportive of Beryl Gilroy and Christine Craig; Mervyn Morris furthered Joyce Gladwell's plans to publish *Brown Face, Big Master*; Edward Kamau Brathwaite promoted many new women's voices in *Savacou 13*; John Figueroa not only encouraged Barbara Ferland to publish her poetry but also gave an account of many of the 'lost' women authors in his contributions to Donald Herdeck's *Caribbean Writers: A Bio-Bibliographical Encyclopaedia* (1979). Nevertheless, Chapters 2 and 5 also suggested how patriarchal editorial practices excluded women from newly emerging poetry anthologies, and how women have continued to be written out of accounts of the period, including the BBC's *Caribbean Voices* and The Caribbean Artists Movement (although *not*, significantly, in the book by Anne Walmsley). More subtle but no less devastating in its effects, is the evidence indicating that a number of talented West Indian women could not conceive of themselves as potential writers during the 1960s and '70s, and that they (Doris Brathwaite is a good example) accepted that their role should be to support their partners in *their* writing careers. As a rare example of a woman novelist competing in an exclusively male domain, we have noted how Sylvia Wynter's development as a creative writer may have been negatively affected by her relationship with her husband Jan Carew. Connected is theme number 8, which cites the tendency for women writers to delay the writing itself, to delay presenting manuscripts for publication, and to delay resubmitting rejected

manuscripts. Anecdotal evidence from Beryl Gilroy, Christine Craig, Merle Hodge and Janice Shinebourne appears to support this phenomenon. What seems to be a reasonable consensus amongst women writers is that gender politics operated (amongst other factors) in subtle ways to ensure that there was little fiction by West Indian women writers and consequently that there were few appropriate role-models (theme number 9).

A West Indian woman writer in search of a role-model in the 1960s and early-1970s would find virtually no women novelists except for a handful of white authors such as Phyllis Allfrey, Eliot Bliss, Jean Rhys, Ada Quayle, and even their novels were barely known at that time. Indeed, of the women novelists presented in Appendix 5.2, the majority of them would fall into the 'white and socially advantaged' category, and it is this which makes the novels of Wynter and Hodge, discussed in Chapter 4, such remarkable achievements. Of all the women authors presented in this thesis, Wynter would appear to be the only one who came to Britain for publication, in the same sense that Selvon and Lamming did. As we have seen, the dominant form to emerge in literary-critical discussions of this period is the very one that women have contributed to least - that is, the novel and, in particular, the novel of migration - and it is this that principally accounts for their absence from literary histories. Faced with a lack of tradition and few role-models, factors which inhibited their choices of literary form, black West Indian women writers looking for antecedents would have been better served by a tradition of writing that produced Mary Prince and Mary Seacole. And, significantly, the autobiographical mode has emerged in this study as the most substantial genre of West Indian women's writing - both in the working-class accounts of otherwise undocumented experience by Federation writers and as in the full-blown autobiographies of Gladwell and Gilroy.

Early material by West Indian women writers has received scant reviewing and/or criticism, thus contributing to its low status and obscurity (theme 10). Of the women's texts discussed in Chapters 4, 5 and 6, only one of them, Merle Hodge's, has received more than passing literary-critical attention. Literary

reviewers of the 1960s and '70s (cited in Chapters 4 and 6) appeared reluctant to find ways of reading works by West Indian women authors which resisted categorisation and which, in retrospect, were necessarily experimental in their treatment of forms, voices, structure and subject-matter. And a lack of serious critical attention at the time of publication no doubt contributed to the novels and autobiographies discussed here going out of print. In addition, it has also been suggested that the work of Rosalind Ashe and Lucille Iremonger might be excluded from the 're-voicing' categories determined by contemporary black recuperative critical projects and feminist scholarship, because of their societal and racial position.

This thesis's attempt to lay down the foundations for an alternative cultural history of the 1960s and '70s, as it impinged upon women writers from the anglophone West Indies, has forged connections between race, gender, class and literary form which may account for their absence from literary histories. In so doing, the thesis offers possible trajectories for future research: Sylvia Wynter's *The Hills of Hebron* and Beryl Gilroy's *Black Teacher* may warrant literary-critical reassessment under the different terms suggested in the sections devoted to those texts; the 'lost' texts of Rosalind Ashe and Lucille Iremonger should perhaps be further explored for their richly evocative accounts of a dysfunctional stratum of colonial society and for what they tell us, from a woman's point-of-view, about how social inequalities were maintained in the families of the pre-independent West Indies; and Joyce Gladwell's *Brown Face, Big Master*, a rare autobiographical account of student life in London, mixed marriage and cultural alienation, might be re-issued and circulated for discussion as an important post-war text which deals explicitly with a black woman's quest for identity. But there are other areas of enquiry which might also usefully attract scholarly attention, for example: women writing poetry in the 'patriarchal space' of the BBC's *Caribbean Voices*, and in the literary journals and anthologies of the 1950s, '60s and '70s, is a topic in need of much more detailed research. Chapter 2 explained how women writers often confined their work to the (more acceptable)

mode of writing for children which, in this period, they saw as an important strategy for re-visioning the world of the child. Consequently, a substantial corpus of Caribbean writing for children was produced by the women authors in this study in the 1960s and '70s (see Appendix 5.2) but children's writing is often neglected by postcolonial critics and is in danger of being written out of a literary history altogether. Such accounts also usually ignore working-class writing, autobiography, and the proto-literary forms in this thesis such as recipe and song collections and, instead, privilege the novel and poetry as the expressive spaces that have traditionally excluded women. The myth - that West Indian women's writing barely exists pre-1980s - is in need of further scrutiny from scholars who may advance us beyond the point at which this search for 'lost' women's writing ends.